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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CIRCUS

Books by Edwin P. Norwood

DAVY WINKLE IN CIRCUSLAND
THE ADVENTURES OF DIGGELDY DAN
IN THE LAND OF DIGGELDY DAN
THE FRIENDS OF DIGGELDY DAN
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CIRCUS

"To warm it to his taste, an old bull will hold the water in his mouth."

"Perhaps you'd better pile out. The Pearl of Arabia is getting mighty rambunctious."

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CIRCUS

BY

EDWIN P. NORWOOD

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To the
RINGLING BROTHERS
Weavers of Magic
to a million
John Fosters

27–23956

NARRATOR'S NOTE

While the account set down in these pages has taken narrative form, the reader must not suppose that it is in any sense a "made up story." On the contrary it is entirely true—from beginning to end. All of the persons herein connected with the Big Show are real persons and these are their real names. So with the menagerie animals, the performing animals and the horses that this account has occasion to name. The sequence of happenings is correct. Furthermore, every mechanical device dwelt upon has been accurately described. In this connection I, for one, feel indebted to John Foster's curiosity. For his interest in the explanations given him by those with whom he talked have resulted in defining things for which one may search in vain among books of reference. At least I know of none that—to mention but a few examples—defines a bail ring, king pole, mud block, middle piece, or side pole, though these things have for years been as necessary to the circus as an anchor or a rudder is to a ship.

E. P. N.

May, 1926.

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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CIRCUS

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CHAPTER I

WITH THE TWENTY-FOUR-HOUR MAN

IN THE twilight-like gloom of Foster's feed-store sheds, two men and a boy were making their way through huge piles of baled hay and stacks of sacked oats. Now and then the smaller man would stop to test the hay by breaking wisps in half and chewing the ends between his teeth. Again, he would take a handful of oats from one of the bags and roll it from palm to palm.

"Um," he said. "Pretty good stuff. Where's the bran?"

"Over here," answered the taller man, as he led the way to the far end of the granary.

Again his companion reached into an open sack and, taking a sample to the light, examined it as he had done with the oats.

"Um," he repeated. "Good stuff. But then you always did give us right feed, Frank."

"Ought to be coming fairly near to knowing

what's wanted, Willie, seeing that I've been furnishing the big show with feed for going on twenty years now."

"Twenty years!" exclaimed Willie Carr. "Jumping buckshot! Where does the time go to, anyhow! Well, let's get over to the office, and I'll give you the loading slips."

As they left the sheds to cross the yard, the boy kept pace at their side.

"Don't know whether you remember him," Frank Foster said, "but this is my boy, John."

"Of course I do. Rode out to the lot on the first hay wagon when we were here two years ago, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well that's a start, son, seeing that Mr. Carr remembers you. Fact is," he added, "John has a favor to ask."

"Hum! Wants to get a job as an elephant trainer, eh?"

"Nothing as ambitious as that," the other laughed. "But you tell your own story, son."

"Well, you see, Mr. Carr, I write for our school paper. And I was talking to father, and he thought maybe you'd help me get a circus story—I mean things that just everybody doesn't know about."

"I get you," nodded the agent. "A little inside stuff. Well, what's the matter with going along

down to the runs to-morrow morning? What do you say to that—go down and help wake 'em up?"

"That would be great!"

"You're sure it will not be too much trouble?" Frank Foster asked.

"No trouble at all. I took my nephew along with me one morning last season, and if John here can ask more questions than he did, he's a dandy. Now, then, for the loading slips," Willie Carr finished, as the three reached the old-fashioned high desk in the office. "Climb up here beside me, John, and I'll give you a first lesson in circus system."

Taking several sheets of paper he wrote "Big Horse Tents" across the top of one of them, saying as he did so:

"You see, one of the most important things we have to consider in the show business is that of time, and there's no surer way in the world to lose it than to make two moves when one is enough. For example, I might have your father dump our entire order of hay, straw, and grain in one heap. But, in that case, our men would have to divide it up to-morrow morning and move it four or five different ways across the lot. So what do we do?

"Why, we make your father's men, the baker's men, the wood and coal dealer, the ice and provision men do this work for us. Early this morning I stepped off the circus grounds, and so I know

where all the different tents are to stand to-morrow. I know exactly where the two big horse tents will be. So, when they are in place, all the big horse tent men will have to do is to walk a few steps and tote inside what we are going to write on this slip."

Then, John watching, he wrote:

5 tons of hay.
2 tons of straw.
200 bushels of oats.
600 pounds of bran.

"Same way with the little horse tent," he added, taking a second slip of paper. And so he went, from it to the "Menagerie" slip, and last of all to the "Dog Wagons."

"But dogs don't eat straw!" John protested.

"Hardly," chuckled Willie Carr. "But they like a good bed as well as you or I. There," he concluded, pushing the slips across the desk. "Divide your stuff that way, Frank. I'll be out on the lot to show your men where to place each load as it arrives. Now, I'm off to the telegraph office. Come on, John."

"You're sure——" Frank Foster began.

"Say," cut in the other, "if John is going to nose out that story, the sooner he gets with it the better."

"All right, all right!" And with that the man and the boy started down the street.

"I can't take you through the whole rounds, because part of them have been made," Willie Carr said, as they walked along. "For, first of all, I went to have a look at the lot. That's the first thing a twenty-four-hour agent must do upon his arrival in town—be sure that the circus is going to have a clear place to show. Of course, the lot was contracted, as we say, weeks and weeks ago. But if that was in the early spring, the contracting agent might not have seen holes that were then filled with snow. Or high weeds may have sprung up. In either case, the holes must be filled and the weeds cut, though, as it happened, neither had to be done here.

"On the other hand, the railroad tracks had to be planked at the crossing where our wagons are to come off the trains to-morrow. The rails stuck up in a way that would have caught the wheels of every single one—which is why the second thing a twenty-four-hour agent must do is to see the railroad officials and find out just where they want us to unload the show."

"But won't they let you do it wherever you want?"

"So far as possible, yes. But mostly there is but one place where it can be done. You've got to remember that if our four trains were placed end to end they would make a string more than a mile long. That's a lot of cars. And these trains must

be spotted in such a way as to give ample time for unloading and yet not interfere with the regular train service.

"You'll often hear folks wonder why we unload a mile, yes, sometimes three miles from the circus grounds, when our trains go square past the show lot on their way into town. But the railroads can't hold up their main-line traffic while the red wagons unload. No, we've got to go where there's plenty of elbow room. But here we are at the telegraph office. Come on in; I want you to see the wire I am going to send."

Taking a blank, Willie Carr filled in the address and then wrote the following message to the circus:

Load poles to caboose. Fast lot. Two-mile haul. Myself Morton Hotel.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"Not much, sir."

"Then I'll do a little translating. Let's take 'Load poles to caboose.' Only, by poles, we don't mean the ones that hold the tents in place, but that part of a wagon folks usually call the tongue. Now, while we are talking here, the show is exhibiting in the town to which this telegram is to be sent. A little later in the day, our train master will call at the red ticket wagon and be told that

he must load the trains so that the poles, or fronts of the wagons, will point toward what is to be the back or caboose end of the trains. That means that, upon arriving here to-morrow morning, they will be pointing in the general direction of the show grounds. Consequently, when they are pulled off, they will be headed just the way we want them. Of course, things aren't always the same. Every crossing offers a different problem. But since, in this case, the unloading can be done that way, it would be very foolish to have the wagons arrive 'poles to engines.' For that would necessitate turning them around once they were on the ground. And, just as with the feed, one move is better than two.

"As to the rest of the telegram, 'Fast lot' means one on which we will be able to make good time. 'Two-mile haul' gives the boss hostler some idea as to what work his teams will have to do. Which reminds me to tell you that the 'haul' always means the distance between the unloading place, or the runs, and the lot. The distance traveled over the railroad is called the 'run.' Now, is everything clear?"

"I think it is," John said, "except about the runs."

"That's what we call the heavy, sheet-iron covered ways that are braced on blocks and jacks at

the end of a train and over which the wagons are lowered to the ground and up which they are drawn when loaded again at night."

"Oh, I know," John said, "around where people always stand when the circus unloads."

"And where we'll be when the roosters are still dreaming to-morrow morning," declared Willie Carr, as he filed the telegram. "Now, then, where will we meet?"

"Wherever you say, sir."

"Good! Then you be in the Morton Hotel lobby at 2:30 sharp. Mind you—sharp, now!"

"I'll be there, all right, all right!"

"You do, and we'll see what we can dig up for that yarn of yours."

"I've got a lot already, thank you. I'm going straight home and write it down so I won't forget."

"A good idea," agreed the circus man. And he swung off down Hazel Street toward his hotel.

CHAPTER II

"WAKING 'EM UP"

THE following morning found John Foster at the entrance of the Morton Hotel just as the town clock was striking the half hour.

"Know all about it," old Mr. Gordon, the night clerk announced, as the boy started to explain. "Mr. Carr said you'd be along. So just hold your horses—he'll be down directly. Guess that's him now," he added, a little later.

Sure enough, Willie Carr at that moment stepped out of the elevator, twirling his room key and humming a bit of a tune.

"Well, old-timer, see you're right on the job," he called out at sight of John.

"Yes, sir."

"I believe he'd make a first rate twenty-four-hour agent. What do you think, Captain?"

"He's up early enough," grumbled Mr. Gordon.

"So are we all of us," added Willie Carr, with a yawn. "My, but I was pounding the hay when you called me. Now, I wonder where those old circus trains are. Let me have that desk 'phone,

will you, please, Captain? Suppose we just call up the dispatcher, John, and see what he knows."

Eagerly John waited.

"Hello! Dispatcher's office? This is the circus twenty-four-hour agent talking. What have you got on our trains? First one just left Tifton? Well, when will that put it in here? In about forty—about thirty minutes, you say? Hum! All right. Much obliged." Then, turning to John, "That will just give us time to have a cup of Java. See you later, Captain," he called back to Mr. Gordon.

Across the street, at the Crescent Café, a sleepy waiter roused himself long enough to serve them.

"A cup of coffee and some of those doughnuts," ordered the circus agent. "What are you having, John?"

"Thank you, but I ate before I left home."

"Well, you'd better put your face into one of these sinkers, anyhow. It will be quite a spell before the flag goes up."

"Flag?"

"Sure. But I'll tell you about that as we walk along."

"Now, then," Willie Carr continued, when they were again in the street. "Now we can talk. Made a lot of notes when you went home?"

"Five whole pages. Only there are some questions I want to ask."

"Shoot as often as you like. First, though, I want to tell you about the cook-house flag. You see, nobody around a circus ever asks if breakfast is ready or dinner served. They ask if the 'flag is up.' When the cook tent goes into the air this morning, you will see a flag run to one of the end staves. On its side is the word HOTEL. The minute that flag flies, the meal is ready and serving goes on as long as it stays up."

"Does everybody eat there?"

"All who are with the show do. Later on, you'll see how the dining tent is divided near the middle by a canvas partition. The biggest part is used by the working men and their bosses and is called the 'long end.' The other part is for the performers and the staff and it's called the 'short end.' "

"Do you buy the groceries and the meat, too?"

"No, that is Mr. Webb's job. He's boss of the commissary department. The first train will bring him to town this morning. But, days ago, he wrote ahead and made arrangements for most of the things he will need—three or four whole beeves among other items. They'll be delivered to our butcher shop, and the circus butchers will cut them up. The best parts will go to the people, the tougher parts to the dog wagons, and the gristle, neck, bones, and joints to the menagerie."

By now, the two had reached the Sampson Street

yards hedged in on the side nearest them by long strings of box cars. Cutting in and out around them, John's guide led the way toward the yard master's shack. As they approached it a man appeared carrying a lantern. The yellow light streamed in and out between his legs, and this caused long, crazy shadows to play across the ground.

"Hey, there!" called Willie Carr. "Where's the boss man?"

"Guess I am," came the gruff reply. "What's wanted?" Then, as they drew nearer: "Oh, it's you, is it, Carr. Thought you ought to be along. Your first train is just coming into the lower yards. There she whistles now."

As he spoke, there rose through the murk of the distance the signaling toots of an engine. John could see the headlight playing upon the rails far down the tracks.

"We'll take her up a piece and then back her in on Track 4," the yard master said. "It'll be ten or fifteen minutes before she's spotted."

"That means ten or fifteen minutes more sleep for the boys," Willie Carr remarked. "This first train is what we call the 'flying squadron.' It's called that because it leaves a town several hours ahead of the other three and usually makes better time. You've like as not seen a string of wagons

leaving the show grounds along about the time you were going to the night performance?"

"Yes, sir. And I always thought it was part of the show."

"So it is, but no part of that which entertains the folks. Instead, it's cook-house equipment, the range and steam-boiler wagons, others containing dishes and silverware, the grocery wagon, the workingmen's commissary wagon and those that carry the dining-tent canvas, seats, jacks, poles, and such-like stuff."

"Gee! Does that fill a whole train?"

"Not at all, old man. That is only part of what's carried on the squadron. For, as soon as evening comes, all the baggage stock, as we call the working horses, are picketed. The two tents that have housed them during the day are taken down and their canvas, poles, and stakes sent off to this train. See those loads of poles?" Willie Carr asked as the squadron moved slowly past them. "They're the horse-tent pole wagons."

"Aren't those next ones cages?" John asked.

"Sure. The whole menagerie is aboard, not counting the elephants, zebras, and camels. That is why, when you come out of the circus after the night performance, the menagerie you saw on your way in is always gone. For, as soon as the audience is inside, the cages are sent off to be loaded

on the squadron. So are the menagerie canvas, the menagerie poles, and everything that is part of it."

"There are sleeping cars, too," John noted.

"Four of them and, besides, three other cars carrying the baggage stock that pulls the squadron wagons from the runs to the lot. In the old days, horses did all the work, but now we have three big motor trucks to help out."

"Father was wondering if some day there wouldn't be anything but trucks," John confided.

"You tell your father not to worry. First place, a circus just wouldn't be a circus without the fine old dapple grays and roans. Second place, tractors and trucks may be all right for hauling stuff from the trains to the edge of the lot, but they aren't worth a cent when it comes to moving wagons on to the lot itself; especially when there has been rain and the ground is soft. Now, then, we'd best be getting along. She's starting to back."

"Then are we going to do it now?" John asked.

"Do what?"

"Why, what you said yesterday. Wake—wake 'em up?"

"That's exactly what we're going to do. We'll board that sleeper marked 71."

A half minute later the two had swung on to the steps of the still moving train. They opened the door that led into No. 71 to find themselves in

a vestibuled passageway, lighted by an acetylene lamp. To the right, John saw a washroom much like that he had once seen on a Pullman train. Only it was larger, and there were more basins.

The vestibule opened into a long aisle in which additional lamps swung from the ceiling at even intervals down its length. The flames were turned low, but there was light enough for John to make out gradually vanishing rows of upper and lower berths. Some had curtains that were drawn across; but others were open, and where that was so, he made out the towsled heads of men against the white of pillow slips.

From one there hung a brawny arm that swung gently to and fro with the last motions of the now easy-running train. As the arm twisted toward him, he saw that a tattooed snake curled halfway down from the elbow. A little beyond, a powerful wrist strapped around with a leather band lay against a blanket's edge. Another was partly hidden under the cuff of a flannel shirt.

From somewhere a sleeper snored loud and steadily.

Then, suddenly, a series of jerks as the brakes were set, a swaying of the berth curtains and the whistle cord, the whine of relaxing rods underneath the car; and now the voice of John's guide drowning the drone of the snorer. The squadron had been spotted. They were "wakin' 'em up!"

"Hey, there, Grant! Frank! Wake up there, Jim! Time to go!"

A few grunts. A groan or two. Then a dozen pairs of feet swung into the aisle. Their owners sat up and, without a word, began to reach for their clothing that hung from hooks at the ends of their berths.

But not all of them. The one nearest John only answered, "Uh-huh!" and then straightway turned over and fell sound asleep again!

"Hi, you, Frank! Hear me? Out of there, now! Give him a clout on the back, John!"

The boy laid a hand on the sleeper's shoulder.

"Aw, a good one! Never wake him up that way. Yank his blanket!"

John gave a determined tug. Whereupon the man sat up, rubbed his eyes, and looked out into John's face.

"Well, stranger!" he exclaimed. "Where did you drop from?"

"I'm with Mr. Carr."

"You mean with Paul Revere," the man called Frank corrected. "The old night rider!"

"Never you mind," retorted Willie Carr. "You just rout yourself out of there and help get this old show on the lot."

Men were now passing up and down the aisle to and from the washroom. Outside, lanterns were beginning to move past the windows.

"How about you back there?" called Willie Carr toward the far end of the aisle. "All right, Jim?"

"All right, Willie," came a voice in reply. "See we're getting up in a tunnel again."

"Can't help it. Got a two-mile haul this morning. Come on, son, let's get over to 77."

As they crowded past the men and reached the vestibule again, he said, with a chuckle, "That's what Jim always says—'Getting up in a tunnel.' Because it's still dark, you know."

On the platform of the adjoining sleeper, he opened the door, stuck his head in, and called:

"What do you say in there?"

A dozen voices answered, "All right. Coming up!"

So, having wakened bosses and men, the two swung back to the ground.

CHAPTER III

DOWN AT THE RUNS

OF COURSE, you don't have to wake everybody," Willie Carr said, as they walked toward the runs, "for many of the men just naturally sense when the squadron has been spotted, or even when it is nearing town. Old-timers have what's called a trouper's nose. They sort of 'smell' the stand, if you get what I mean."

Soon the stock-car doors began to slide open, and next, runways were placed from sills to the ground. Men leading horses thumped their way down them. Others moved off toward the end of the squadron. John saw that the horses were harnessed and ready for work.

"All baggage stock—unless a horse is sick—travels fully harnessed, except that the bits are unsnapped," Willie Carr said. "They grow accustomed to this and do quite a bit of sleeping on the run. To ease things for them, straps, fastened in the roof of the car, are hooked to their collars, so that the weight is removed from their necks. Still, they get their best rest during the day, say

from ten in the morning to five in the afternoon, when they haven't much to do but eat and snooze."

Still talking, they approached the crossing. The boy could see where wide oak planks had been laid between the rails and then extended like a floor on either side. A puffing switch engine was pulling the caboose away from the rear end of the squadron. Now, men climbed aboard the flat car from which it had been uncoupled. They hooked heavy ropes to the iron-covered runways and dragged them out from under the wagon that stood at the farthermost end.

"The end of the train from which the unloading takes place is always spotted exactly nine paces from the crossing planks," Willie Carr pointed out. "Then the lower butts of the runways rest on the planking."

While the gang tussled with the runs, still other men, armed with crowbars, were hammering and prying at something underneath the wheels of the wagons.

"They are removing the chalks. A chalk is a solid block of wood with spikes protruding from one side. When the wagons are run aboard at night, these same men, called chalkers, stand in just the right place, and the instant a wagon has been drawn to where it should be stopped, they shove the chalks under the wheels. The impact of the still moving wagon forces the spikes into

the floor of the car, and this wedges it so very tight that, no matter how much the train may sway or jerk, your wagon stays put."

Now, by the light of torches, as Willie Carr called the squat cans filled with kerosene, each fitted with a thick round wick, the runs had been blocked into place. Looking back along the cars, John saw that other torches had been set on the gunnels of the flats where the chalkers were at work.

A breeze flattened the flames at times and caused wreaths of black smoke to swirl up and away until they blended with the surrounding night. From the darkness beyond came the occasional flash of a lantern and the voices of men speaking to horses. Now the horses were coming toward him.

There were stones between the tracks, and hoofs striking against them made yellow sparks. These came nearer and nearer until the faces and then the gray bodies of two ghost-like horses emerged into the light rings made by the flares. Something jingled musically along in their wake.

"Always makes me think of sleigh bells—hearing the lead-bar rings pounding over the stones," Willie Carr said. "These are the two pull-away teams coming now—called that because they pull the wagons far enough away from the runs to allow the hauling teams to hook up and take them off to the lot."

"There's another coming just behind them," announced John.

"That's the pull-over team. Now, get this straight, for there's a lot of difference between the pull-away and the pull-over teams. As the pull-over passes, you'll see, besides the driver, a man carrying one end of a rope with an iron hook attached to it. The other end of the rope will be coupled to the lead bars."

"That's right," John said admiringly. "There he is!"

"He's sometimes called the snaker. Watch and see what he does with the hook."

By now, the pull-over team had come abreast of the wagon that was next to the runs. As it did, the snaker reached up and found an iron ring that was fixed to a bolt on the side of the wagon. With a deft jab, he inserted the hook in the ring.

Quickly, the still moving team took up the slack in the rope. Now it grew tight as a bowline. From somewhere a voice called:

"There she goes!"

The first wagon had been pulled over the end of the flat car and on to the runs. Yet it did not go all the way to the ground. Instead, it suddenly stopped in its downward course, held by something—John could not see what.

Certainly, it was not the pull-over team, for their driver was now turning them around. As

they wheeled, the pull-over rope sagged to the ground while the snaker lifted the hook from the ring. But, just as he did so, the wagon started downward again. Not swiftly, but easily—almost gently, until it had descended to the floor of the crossing.

"Now, then, come with me and I'll show you what it is that lowers the wagons, once the pull-over rope is unhooked from the ring."

Willie Carr led the way around the end to the opposite side of the train. There John saw a man standing on a sort of springboard that extended out from the truss rods near the rear of the flat car. In front of where the man perched on this "bridge" were two heavy, upright iron spools, bolted to the side of the gunnel. Around these spools a rope was looped in peculiar fashion, its free end passing through the man's hands.

"He's the snubber," Willie Carr said. "Those spools are called snubbing posts, and the rope cable is what we call the snubbing rope. Now, watch how they work it. See the other end of the rope? There, the snubber's helper is carrying it along the top of the gunnel. It's got a hook on the end—same as the snaker's. He'll hook it into still another ring at the back of the next wagon that's to come down the runs."

From across the train where John had just been

came the plodding sound of the pull-over team's hoofs. Another wagon began to move along the floor of the flat car. The helper on the gunnel was fixing his hook into the ring at the rear of it. The wagon passed the snubbing posts. Its front wheels gained the runs. The snubbing rope tightened, and then, with the casting off of the pull-over team, bristled under the strain.

"Watch the snubber at the posts," Willie Carr directed.

Slowly, the man began to let the rope slip through the leather pads that protected his hands. Slowly, like the writhings of a snake, the coils that gripped the snubbing posts slipped around and around the polished spools. And just as slowly, the wagon descended the runs to the crossing.

"But we mustn't overlook the polers," said John's guide, "for theirs is about the most ticklish job of all. First, as you see, they pull the wagon pole or tongue from underneath the wagon to which it belongs. That tongue was uncoupled and placed there when the show was loaded last night. They shoot the pole into place and then make it fast to the hounds by inserting the king pin. That, in itself, is simple enough. But when it comes to poling down the runs—well, not for me! Keep your eyes on the front of this next wagon."

As it started to descend, John saw that a man was holding fast to the iron that curved back from the pole tip.

"It's his job to stick to that gooseneck and so see that the pole doesn't switch the wrong way when the front wheels hit the crossing," Willie Carr pointed out. "Try that for awhile, if you want to get muscle. And if the snubbing rope parts—woe to the poler!"

"Did it ever break?" John asked.

"I saw it snap one morning. Pole knocked the man halfway over the crossing. Broke both his legs. That's why the snubbing rope is the most frequently inspected of all ropes with the show."

As the wagon lurched on to the crossing, the poler bore against the gooseneck with all his weight, and so forced the end of the pole toward the waiting pull-away team. The huge van was swung into the clear to make room for the next.

But the "next" proved to be of quite another kind. Rumbling and snorting it came banging along over the sheet-iron plates that bridged the space where one car joined ends with its neighbor.

"It's the big Mack truck," Willie Carr said, "and always comes off under its own power. On it we'll start for the lot, for our next job will be to torch the road."

CHAPTER IV

TORCHING THE ROAD

AS THE truck came to a halt a dozen lengths from the runs, a knot of men who had come from the sleepers straggled toward it. By the light of the crossing flares, John saw that they carried sheaves of what looked like arrows with feathered hilts. They climbed aboard and sat dangling their heels against the black body. Two others joined them. These lifted round-bellied torches from a box that was built into the truck.

As the men applied matches to the wicks, the soft glow lighted the group, or glinted against the arrow-like bundles. It made John think of Indians starting a signal fire.

"Morning, Happy," Willie Carr called to someone who had just come up. "Everybody out?"

"How about you, pin men?" hailed the one addressed as Happy.

"On the old chariot," answered a voice from the arrow-armed group.

"Got company this morning," Willie Carr an-

nounced, as they walked toward the truck. "This is Mr. Snellen, John."

The boy looked into the face of a man who was for all the world like his own Uncle Jack. A slouch black hat but partly concealed his silvery gray hair. He was unusually broad of shoulder, and wore gold-rimmed spectacles.

"John's going to write a circus story for his school paper. He's Frank Foster's son. You remember the feed man here, Happy?"

"Sure I do. But let's be getting aboard. Here, you sit next to me," he invited. "Anybody named John is bound to be all right. You see, that's my name too."

"Straight ahead to the second street, Sam," Willie Carr said to the driver. A snort from the truck, and they had left the runs behind.

"Now we are going to torch the road so that the drivers will know how to reach the show grounds. Yesterday the superintendent of streets and I agreed on the route to be taken to the lot. That's why the Mack truck always leads the way. Here we are, Sam. The right-hand corner. Now, son, you watch what I do."

Willie Carr had not sat down, but had been standing on the running board. As the truck slowed up, one of the men at the rear handed him a lighted torch. Jumping to the ground, he placed the beacon just inside the curbing.

"Now the next turn to the left," he called to Sam. "Seeing that torch the drivers will know they are to make a right-hand turn into the adjoining street. Then they'll keep going a block and next swing to the left as this second torch will tell them."

Again leaving the running board, he placed beacon number two.

"In other words, as long as there are no beacons, the teams move straight ahead; but when they come to one, they turn into the first street to the right or left depending upon whether the beacon is on the right- or left-hand side of the street along which they're moving."

"Yes, and the horses know the meaning of the lights as well as the drivers," asserted Sam.

"Sometimes better," grunted Happy Jack Snellen. "Tom Lynch was telling me the other day about those big roan leaders on the menagerie pole wagon. Seems they'd been pegging along four or five blocks when they started to swing off to the right. There being no torch, the driver pulled 'em back into line. But they insisted and started to veer in again. Hopping down to see what the trouble was, the helper stumbled over a dead torch—still smoking, but no fire."

"How did the horses know?" John asked.

"Can't say. Maybe they smelled the smudge; or it might have been just common horse sense.

Anyhow, it'll likely help you piece out that yarn you're after."

"Oh, John will get a story all right," put in Willie Carr, as they jolted along, "because he's not afraid to ask questions. What was that last one back at the runs?"

"Why the men that unload the trains are called razorbacks?"

"From the build of the circus flat cars. You see in order to stand the extra heavy loading and not sag in the middle, the cars are rounded high toward the center, just as with some bridges you've seen. One built that way is called 'razorback' because its back is like that of a razorback hog. Am I right, Happy?"

"Like as not, yes. And yet I've heard tell of a prettier reason. It would have had its start when shows first began to travel by rail. Prior to that time all cages and wagons had to be pulled from town to town by team. So they weren't half as heavy or as long as they are to-day. In fact, they were so short you could place 'em crosswise of the flats, instead of end to end, and so save room.

"But to do that, the cages had to be turned after they'd been wheeled up the runs. So, once a cage was on the flats, a gang of train men would get down on all fours under it, their shoulders against the gear. Then a boss would holler:

"'Raise your backs!' and they'd luff the cage

around at right angles. I've heard say that this got shortened to 'razorbacks.' "

"That's a fine reason," John said, approvingly.

"Well, you'd probably best give both," Happy Jack advised, "for two reasons, like two heads are mostly better than one, especially when neither's terribly certain. But whatever you do, don't ever let me hear of you telling about razorbacks working around the lot. Rasorbacks never do anything but unload and load trains; just as canvas men always work on canvas."

"Are the men back of us canvas men, Mr. Snellen?"

"Nope, they're pin men. And now that we've got to the lot, let's put some weight on our feet and I'll give you a few pointers on laying out a show."

CHAPTER V

A FIREFLY LAYOUT

IT WAS still black night and so too dark to see things with any distinctness. But, as the men piled down from behind and moved into the path of the truck's headlights, John saw that what he had taken for arrows were only iron rods, and the things at their hilts, small bits of cloth. Those carrying them slung the bundles to their shoulders and tramped through the gloom toward the center of the lot.

Already Willie Carr and Happy Jack Snellen were walking in the same direction. John followed at their heels.

"There's a world of room, Happy," the former was saying, "though, as I figure it, you'll have to throw the back end of the big top pretty much over to the right to avoid a swampy spot."

"We'll soon find out. Plenty of room for the front here?"

"All kinds."

"Good. Then we'll tackle the big top."

"There are more ways of laying out a show lot than there are of skinning a kangaroo," Happy

The pull-over team takes the wagon over the flat cars to the runs.

On the opposite side from where the pull-over team works, the snubber stands ready at the snubbing posts.

As the snubbing rope is paid out, the wagon descends the runs.

The poler holds to the gooseneck and guides the wagon toward the waiting pull-away team.

Jack confided to John, as they picked their way across the pasture, "for pretty nearly every one is of a different shape and size. Still, there are certain rules that you've always got to bear in mind. First place, you've got to have a good front—that's where the side show, ticket wagons, candy stands, and big show main entrance are located. Second place, you've got to have wagon room in which to store your wagons once they're emptied. Third place, you've got to be all-fired careful not to bottle yourself in. For when night comes, some parts of the show have to be pulled off the lot ahead of other parts. And you can't be dragging wagons through the big top while the clowns are kicking up. No, sir; you've got to get 'em off by going around it, or out some back road—if there is a back road. How about it here, Willie?"

"There's a sort of trick one—turtle back and gumbo, though. We'd be stuck in it until Christmas if it ever rained. I've figured pulling off through the front. Here's the back and up-side of the lot now; here where this fence runs."

"Fair enough," returned Happy. "Now we can get to work."

He put one heel against the shadowy boards and then counted his paces outward.

"That's for wagon room and a road," he said. "Hey, you, Red! How about a pin?"

"Right here," answered a man from the dark-

ness. He handed him one of the arrow-like rods. Happy pushed its pointed end into the ground.

"This is what we call locating the center lacing in the big top round end," he told John. "Now for the tape line."

Already another assistant was drawing yard after yard of line from a flat, nickel-plated box. The one called Red held the free end of the tape against the top of the upright pin, while the laying-out boss took the bulk of the line and struck off through the dark. As he strode along, he watched the figures on the tape by the light of an electric pocket lamp. When it showed "152 ft.," he stopped. Another pin man handed him a rod with a ribbon of white cloth tied to its ringed top.

"Now, let's have a squint at your old white-eye," Happy Jack bawled back.

A platinum-like spot wavered in the darkness and then steadied.

"Red's roosting his pocket torch on the top of the first pin," he explained. "This is the way we line up the centers."

He passed the pin he was holding a little to the right, then to the left, as if aiming, and then thrust it well into the ground. "That marks the first center pole. . . . All right, Red! Let go the line! That's One! Meaning," he added to John, "Center pole No. 1."

He wound part of the tape back into its box.

"Get hold the end as it creeps up and lay it at the top of this pin, Joe," he instructed.

He and John again moved forward, this time for a distance of sixty feet by the line. Here Happy Jack once more reached for a white-flagged pin.

"Lights!" he called.

In answer two "white-eyes" settled into position, one at the top of each of the pins left behind. A moment of sighting, and the boss had stuck still another pin, adding,

"That's two! Not pins, mind you, but center poles."

Another dragging of the tape through the lush grass of the pasture to the point where it again read "60 ft." A repetition of the sighting along the row of lights. Another pin jabbed firmly in the earth. Then:

"That's three! There are six center poles, each sixty feet apart," he told John, as they again moved forward, "and it always pays to call 'em off as you plant the rods, especially when you're laying out in the dark. Of course, in the early summer, or when we arrive late, there's daylight to help. But when it's a firefly layout like this, it's best to play safe."

It did make you think of firefly time John thought as he peered about. For now electric torches were winking in still other directions. Or

it was like being on a hillside and looking down on a town at night.

"Nor do we always lay out the same way," Happy Jack continued, as he sunk another pin. "For instance, at the beginning of a season when the big top's brand new, the length over all is as much as twenty-five feet shorter than it is now. That's because the ropes and canvas stretch that much after we've been out awhile. Or suppose a hard rain was setting in at this very minute and she promised to be soaking wet in the course of the next several hours. If you didn't take that into consideration in advance and lay out the centers accordingly, the old top would plumb pull herself to pieces when she started to shrink.

"I recollect"—and the boss chuckled at the thought—"I recollect a fellow who came to me all het up one day. Wanted to sell us a tent that wouldn't have to be laced. All we'd do would be to 'zip' the middle pieces and quarters together like when your sister closes the front of her zippers. Huh! Why, not having any play, that sort of a top would have more skylights in a week than a hot-house roof!"

"But how do you know just exactly how much to measure off at different times?" John asked.

"There's no special rule. You just keep your old guessing machinery well oiled. Same way when setting the first pin and starting to line out

through the dark. Ten to one an old hand will come out right. You see, after you've tramped over show lots in the soot o' night for thirty or forty years, you sort of develop eyes in the bottom of your feet."

By this time the last center pole pin had been set. Then came the business of locating the lacings and the stake lines. An assistant held the free end of the tape against the top of the sixth center pin, while the laying-out boss began to describe an arc with the line, much as you would by fastening a string to a piece of chalk, pressing your finger against the string's end and then drawing the half of a circle.

At every given number of feet along the arc he set a pin. Those with red flags indicated where the big top stakes were to be driven. Others designated the lacings.

"Know the principle of a big top?" Happy Jack inquired. "Not likely. No way of finding out. I never could figure the chaps that lay out the dictionaries. They pack 'em full of drawings that tell all about the different parts of ships, castles, and such like; but nary a word on circus tents. Now, what you might call the roof of this big top is made up of eighteen pieces. When we take down at night each section is rolled into a bale and loaded into the big top canvas wagons. When the wagons pull on to the lot, there's got to be

something to show where to drop each of the bundles so's they can be spread and laced together before raising. That's one of the reasons for the lacing pins."

The last of the big top pins in place, Happy Jack and his crew started on the menagerie layout. As with the larger tent, pins with white flags marked the menagerie center poles. But those used to indicate its stake line were topped with blue; because, as the boss pointed out, the two lines of stakes ran fairly close together and confusion might result were both the same color.

When it came to laying out the main entrance, or "marquee," at the menagerie front, the men set pins that bore double colors of red and blue. Yellow flagged pins were used to mark the position of side-show stakes and poles.

"Always the same colors, season in and season out," Happy Jack said. "And not just a happenstance either. Naturally, the centers and the lacings are the most important points. And at break of day, white can be seen farther than any other color. In a very bright sun, white's of no more use than a nickel on a railroad train. Red is the best then. See those white babies beginning to show up?"

So interested had John been in the work of laying out that he had forgotten to notice that day was breaking. Now the stars were gone, and the

"old white-eyes" stowed away in twenty pockets.

As the pasture grayed with the dawn, he suddenly realized that for a half hour or more his ears had been partly conscious of muffled sledge thumps and the deep rumbling of wagons moving in the lower half of the pasture. Now a film of light fog lifted to disclose a tent half built at the foot of a gentle slope. Near it, a dozen wagons were grouped, and from the top of one, a stack sent out a plume of smoke to blend with the lazying mist. The cook house, of course!

The show was beginning to take form.

CHAPTER VI

PUTTING UP THE MENAGERIE

FROM the higher ground on which he stood, John saw still another crew of men laying out the big horse tents in a more distant part of the pasture. Near them the blacksmith shop was going into the air.

At the "front," where the big Mack truck had drawn up less than an hour before, a score of wagons were pulling on to the lot.

"The dens will stand there until we get the menagerie up and ready for them," Happy Jack Snellen remarked. "That's always one of the first jobs of the morning—to get roofs over the animals and horses so's they can be fed and bedded down. The horse tents have their own crew and boss who lay 'em out and put 'em up. My crew lays out the big top, menagerie, and side show, puts up the menagerie, and sees to the driving of the big top stakes. Driving the big top stakes readies things up for Jim Whalen and his men, who arrive on the second section, so that they can dig in soon's they've had breakfast. Here comes thir-

teen now. It carries menagerie stakes—or staubs, if you want the slang of it."

A red, boxed wagon drawn by six dapple grays was heading toward them.

"All right, driver! Come along! More around this way—pull on your left hand!"

Next came wagons loaded with bales of menagerie-tent canvas, which men rolled to the ground as the heavy vans moved from lacing pin to lacing pin.

Then the menagerie-pole wagon.

Meanwhile, sledge gangs were driving stakes in pairs at each point where the white-topknotted pins marked a menagerie-tent center pole.

"Those deuce stakes will be for leverage in raising each of the six poles," Happy Jack explained. "Ever see a center pole and its fixings? Got more parts than a dollar watch. First place, clap your eyes on that hunk of wood that Shorty's bringing over here now. It's what we call a mud block. There's one to set under every center pole so's the weight of the canvas won't sink the pole butts into the ground once the top is up.

"The first operation is to set the rounded bottom of the mud block against the two leverage stakes—the way Shorty's doing now. See the iron spike that's fixed into the face of the block? We call that the horn. Now, take a peek at the bottom of the center pole that's just been brought

up. Hole in it, you say? That's the grummet—iron lined and made to receive the horn from the mud block."

Near the butt-end of each center pole the canvas men were placing huge coils of rope fitted with pulley-blocks. Others brought heavy hoops, made of rounded iron as thick as a broom handle. They dropped one beside each of the six piles of tackle.

"That's a bail ring," Happy Jack said, nudging the one which lay nearest them with the tip of his toe, "and a bail ring is about the most important article around a show lot.—Slip it on, men!—Of course," he added, "it has to be shoved over the pole butt before the mud block goes on. Now, then—see this bunch of tackle with the blue pulley blocks? It's the main falls; called that because it's got the mainest job of the several that are rigged to the pole. The mainest job owing to the fact that it pulls the canvas into the air.

"The down end of the main-falls rope hooks into the bail ring like this." The boss stooped and made it fast. "Then the rope runs up the pole and goes through the pulley block that Shorty's just hooking into the iron at the skyward end of the pole. Follow it with your eye and you'll see that after passing through that top-side pulley it returns down the pole to where we're standing and goes under this pulley wheel that's set in this slit made in the butt of the pole.

"Now, then," Happy Jack concluded, "once the pole is raised in place, all you have to do is to pull on this lower end of the falls rope to cause the bail ring to slide skyward up the pole—a good deal like you'd hoist a mainmast boom on a sailing vessel. Only, before this and the other five bail rings are raised, the canvas must be tied to 'em."

"Gee, they've got to be strong, all right!" John said.

"Pshaw, lad, these are only finger rings compared to those you'll see Jim Whalen using on big top. His weigh a hundred and thirty pounds apiece. And the load they carry is heavier than forty elephants. It's so heavy that the main falls double up and down the center poles six times in order to get sufficient purchase on the lift. There in the big top the bail rings take the canvas skyward and hold it. Besides that, they support the weight of the electric lights, the chandeliers, and all of the rigging used for the big flying numbers and every other act that goes in the air. I tell you, boy, the longer you troupe the more respect you have for a bail ring."

There did, indeed, seem to be an amazing number of parts to a center pole. For now that the bail ring had been adjusted, the mud block attached, and the main falls hooked in place, the light falls which would later handle the gas and electric lamps had to be rigged. Then, while the

pole still rested on the ground, the "raising guy," the "lowering guy," and the "short guy" were looped over its skyward end. Lastly, the flagstaff was inserted in the "staff iron," and the lanyard, which would later spread a fine pennant to the breeze, attached to the staff head.

"And now it's ready for raising," Happy said. "Come on with you, boys!"

A dozen pairs of hands lifted the tapering end from the ground. Then they pushed it high over their heads until, passing the angle of resistance, the raising guy, manned by still other workers, stationed well out beyond the stake line, gained a purchase and brought it upright. That it might not slough to left or right, men slowly paid out the supporting guys. Then, the pole finally in position, these cables and the raising guy were made fast to deeply driven stakes.

The first center pole was in place. Quickly the gang tackled the next.

Meanwhile, others of the menagerie crew were distributing smaller poles of different lengths and color.

"Including the center poles, this and the big top have four kinds," the boss said. "Naming them outward from the centers, there first comes the circling row of blue quarter poles, next the red quarter poles and last, around the entire edge, the side poles. See the stripes painted midway along

the heaviest ones? That's the point of balance, put there so's when a man picks one off a wagon he knows just where to glue his shoulder. Otherwise, he'd have to fiddle around and so lose time. And now, all six centers up, we're ready to spread the muslin.

"What do you say?" he called to the crew. "Let's open up these bundles men, and see what's inside. Quarters first!"

Then to John,

"That's what we call the V-shaped pieces that form the round ends."

An assistant boss began a running fire of orders:

"Roll it! Roll it! Head over! Hit it hard! Over again! . . . Pull it out and shake it up! Take it this way!—take it that! Open your hands and let it down!"

Then the next quarter until the "V's" of canvas patterned the ground like great gray fans.

"Now to the middles! Hit it!—Hit it again! Ro-o-o-oll it! Out to the borders.—All right!"

So, from bale to bale, until the entire canvas had been spread.

" 'Middles' is short for 'middle pieces'," Happy Jack interpreted. "A middle piece is always rectangular in shape while a quarter is always in the form of a triangle. If you took the four quarters of this top, laced 'em together, and hoisted 'em on a single center pole, you'd have a perfect round

top just like the old one-ring shows used to use. But nowadays we need a whole lot more room. So we get it by splitting the round top, setting one half of it to the left and the other half to the right, and then filling in the gap between with a roof made up of middle pieces."

"But the big top's lots longer than the menagerie, isn't it?" John asked.

"Pretty nearly twice as long; though the number of center poles is the same. The trick's turned by using a bigger round top, larger poles, and wider middle pieces. Besides, as you'll see later on, each of the big top's round ends has four 'quarters' instead of two. I suppose they really should be called 'eights,' though, for some reason or other, they've always been spoken of as 'quarters,' same as here in the menagerie."

As they looked toward the big top layout, John saw that a miniature pile driver, set on a wagon, was following along the red-flagged stake line. At each point marked by a pin, a man placed the nose of a staub against the ground, while another, who operated the chugging engine, set the mechanical hammer in motion, to send it deep into the earth. They were, as the laying-out boss had promised, "making things ready" for Jim Whalen and his crew.

By now, the menagerie tent middle pieces and quarters had been laced into one vast "roof."

Canvas men were busy fastening it to the bail rings. Care had been taken to stretch the ground end of the main falls well out across the pasture floor before the canvas had been spread over them.

The last lashing made, men laid hold of the falls. Six different gangs, grasping as many different cables, lay back from them as men about to engage in tug-of-war.

"Walk away with 'em!" sang a voice.

The workers put their weight to the falls. The pulley wheels at the pole butts creaked into motion. The bail rings slid upward, and with them the menagerie roof.

"That's what's called 'raising the peaks,'" Happy Jack told John. "Here we do it by man power, but only horses will do on the big top."

When the bail rings had lifted the roof a third of the way to the top, the main falls were tied off until the side poles were set. Yet another raising of the peaks, and then came the work of putting the quarter poles in place.

This was done by thrusting the horn that sprouted from the top of each pole into the grummet sewed in the tent top to receive it. The last one shoved home, the peaks were drawn into final position at the tops of the centers. Finally the side wall was hung.

Around the entire tent, men were tightening the guy ropes that ran down to the circling rows of

stakes. The menagerie had taken definite shape. The waiting cages began to move in under the roof.

Then, suddenly, from somebody, somewhere, came the shout:

"She's in the air!"

John heard a dozen voices repeat the cry.

He thought the announcement came a trifle late, for most certainly the peaks had been guyed skyward fully five minutes before.

"Come along, John," Happy Jack Snellen called across to him. "Here's where we scoff."

Then he knew the meaning of the shouts. Looking out over the lot, his eyes found the cook tent.

The flag was up!

Mother *The circus kitchen was located a half-dozen steps back of the cook tent.*

"Some chops!" John said.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE COOK TENT

AS THE boy and Happy Jack descended the slope, a breeze carried whiffs of frying bacon toward them. It seemed to John that he had never smelled anything half so good.

From the horse tents and blacksmith shop men were hurrying in the same direction as themselves. Others, from the menagerie, passed them as they went.

At the entrance of the cook tent, a man was taking tickets and dropping them into slits in a box.

"All working men must have tickets for every meal," Happy Jack said. "They get them from their different bosses just before the flag goes up. That's so ringers can't impose on the show. But the bosses, staff, and performers pass on their face, so to speak.

"O. K. for my assistant here, Doc?" he asked the doorman, as they passed.

"As if you didn't know," answered the other, grinning at John.

"We'll eat at the bosses' table here in the long

end," Happy Jack decided, once they were inside. "Whatever you've got, and the same for my friend here," he told the waiter.

First there were grapefruit and cereal, then the bacon that had smelled so delicious, with eggs fried along with it, boiled potatoes fairly bursting from their jackets, coffee, of course, and bread and butter.

"Only don't tip yourself off as a greeny by taking the top slice," Happy warned, as he handed John the bread. "The open air hardens it a bit, and besides, when there's wind, it's liable to have sand in it. Just lift it up and take one from underneath."

The tables used by the bosses were located next to the red curtain that separated the long end from the short end of the dining tent. Running in rows from them were other tables occupied by the working men. John saw that the men were given exactly the same food as was served to Mr. Snellen and himself.

"Never any difference," Happy Jack said. "Everybody eats alike, and what's more, eats all he wants. Why, on a cold morning, and especially when we're late, I've seen some of those huskies put away three steaks at a sitting. And bread!—Oh, Ollie," he called to a man who had just come in.

"This is Mr. Webb," he said, as the other came

toward them. "I was just trying to tell John Foster here how much bread a good healthy canvas man will eat."

"Ask me something easy. A loaf apiece, maybe. I'll tell you one thing, though: When we first come out under canvas, our bread bill will run twenty-five per cent. higher than it does a little later on."

"Go 'way!"

"Never fails to. That's because a lot of the men haven't done so well during the off months and so have to get fattened up. After a couple of weeks, they begin to ease off and the orders grow normal again."

"There's an item for you," Happy nodded to John.

"Oh, so it was you who helped Willie Carr wake us up this morning!" the commissary exclaimed. "Well, don't be afraid to ask anything you want to know about the cook house. After breakfast, I'll show you the kitchen. Getting plenty to eat? Here, Frank! How about some cakes?"

"Coming up, bossman," a voice replied. Then when, a minute later, its owner came with two stacks of smoking buckwheat cakes, he ejaculated, "Well, boil me if it isn't the buddy who dug me out of the clover this morning!"

"Gaze on him, John!" proclaimed Willie Carr who had just come in, "Mister Frank Detre, of Worcester, Mass. Headwaiter in the long end

and champion long-distance sleeper of seventeen states."

"Introduced by Mister Willie Hollow-legs Carr," came back Frank, "who can see the flag farther and eat more than any agent ahead of the show."

"They're always abusing each other," Happy Jack confided to John, as he passed him the maple syrup. "And Willie's been routing Frank out for going on twenty years now."

Others came to sit at the bosses' tables. There were Art Rooney, boss of the menagerie; "Old Andrew," who had charge of the giraffes; Jim Doyle and Blackie Diller, assistant boss hostlers, and others whose names John did not remember.

"There's Ollie Webb back in the kitchen," Happy Jack said, as they rose from their last hot cake. "This will be a good time to catch him."

"Come on over to the menagerie after while, and I'll show you how we brush the hippo's teeth," invited Art Rooney.

"I will," promised John.

The circus kitchen was located a half dozen steps back of the cook tent.

"Just in time to see a fine mess of peas," the chief commissary called, as John came inside. "How'd you like to shell what's in there?"

A pan so heavy that it took two men to lift it to the top of a cask greeted John's eyes.

"Once they're washed, they'll be dumped into one of those big copper caldrons, and the steam will do the rest. Steam is the principal fuel around here. See that donkey-engine-looking affair out there? That's what we call the steam-boiler wagon. It's the first to be fired of a morning. Pipes laid from it along the ground hook up with this row of copper kettles, the steam passes into open spaces between the kettle walls and so cooks vegetables, stews, soups, coffee, and the like."

"Will the others that come have peas for breakfast?" asked John.

"Oh, no. This stuff is for dinner. You see, as soon as one meal is well on its way, we start preparing for the next. When there are upward of sixteen hundred people to be fed three times every day, we've got to do it that way to keep up. Of course, some things have to be served right off the fire. Others can be cooked ahead of time and then kept hot in the steam boxes over at the left."

They passed the boxes and turned to where the pastry cooks were mixing pie crust.

"Apple pie for supper," Ollie Webb said. "How many are you making for to-night?" he inquired of the head baker.

"Figuring on a hundred and fifty, boss."

"Well, better increase it to a hundred and fifty-one," the commissary chief directed with a wink toward John. "Got an extra boarder to-day.

Now," he added, "maybe you'd like to see how those potatoes you had for breakfast were cooked."

They walked past the score of white-coated chefs to the boiler wagon. A man dressed much like a locomotive engineer was raking the fire box.

"That's Hank Hill," Ollie Webb said, as they approached, "and he knows more about steam and boiling potatoes than any trouper alive. Got a good scald on those spuds this morning, Hank."

"Wall, the steam was exactly right," drawled the grimy-faced engineer. "Gimme right steam in this old tea kettle o' mine, and I'll bile 'em to a turn any time."

He squinted at the water gauge.

"Thar's as much difference in steam as there is between a couple o' strange bulldogs," Hank went on, now addressing his remarks to John. "You see, the way I do it is thiswise: I sinks the perf'rated boxes holdin' the taters in this iron-lined pit at the back o' the b'iler. Then I takes the steam-hose nozzle and shoves it in and shoots. Got to know just how your steam is when you do it, though. Leave 'er blow too long, and the jackets'll peel plumb off. Hold 'er in just long enough and they'll come out prettier'n a rosebud touched by the sun. Get the p'int?"

"Yes, sir."

Hank eyed him approvingly.

"You're a smart hombre. Anybody can see that

with his lashes singed. Well, come back whenever you're a mind. Can't tell you much about any other part of the show. But I know steam—shucks a'mighty, I know steam."

"Hank ought to, if anybody does," Ollie Webb said, as he and John skirted the edge of the kitchen. "He's been a trouper for going on fifty years. And he won't allow anybody to touch that boiler wagon but himself. Watches it like a cat watching kittens. Even has all his meals alongside the fire box."

"I saw a cat in the cook house," John volunteered.

"Mother, like as not. She's traveled a hundred thousand miles since she joined out one morning, some four or five years back. She was only a kitten then. Wandered in from nobody knew where and curled up behind one of the ranges to get warm. That night the boys made a house for her out of a vegetable crate and lashed the crate to the grocery wagon. She's had a slather of kittens since then, and stalked field mice in most every state in the Union. That's one of her babies now—just skinning up that side pole.

"The cook-house boys are always carting pets along. We had a duck one season. Called him Moocher. Might have him yet, only one of the flunkies put him in a stream alongside of the lot one day. Remember Moocher's get-away, Grant?"

the commissary called to a man who was passing.

"I should say I do! You couldn't have caught him with a motor boat."

"But the star was Cocky, the bantam rooster," laughed the boss.

"He certainly was a darb," agreed Grant. "Trouped with us three seasons, and if ever there was a cock of the walk, he was it. Never did like Andrew, the dwarf. Used to try chasing him. And whenever a town chicken showed up—good-night! Remember the time, boss, when the cook house was butted up against the hen yard in Newark? Naturally enough, the gillie roosters and hens came around looking for chuck. It kept Cocky busy giving 'em the bum's rush. By the time we packed up he was all in."

"What became of him?" John wanted to know.

"Had to get rid of the little rascal," Ollie Webb said. "Got so spoiled that he thought he owned the show. Flew right into a midget's face one day and took a nip out of his ear. That was too much of a good thing. Plenty of meat around without using up our actors. Speaking of meat—cast your eyes over this."

They had come to the circus butcher shop. Like the kitchen, it was roofed with canvas, but instead of requiring center poles, its top was spread over a big wagon and the eaves extended outward to supporting side poles. Under this shelter John

saw blocks strewn with knives, saws, and cleavers. Shoulders and entire quarters of beeves lay on long tables. Two men were engaged in cutting chops and tossing them into a pan that was even larger than the one that had been filled with peas.

John lifted one side of it.

"Some chops!" he said.

"Some chops is right," laughed Ollie Webb. "Here's still more stuff in the cold storage compartment."

He swung open a door at the front end of the wagon. John caught a glimpse of dressed porkers hanging from hooks, and the plump breasts of chickens piled on big cakes of ice.

"In every town played for but one day—and that's eighty per cent. of those visited in a season —we buy enough supplies for dinner, supper, and breakfast," John's guide explained. "The dinner and supper stuff is served in the town where it is bought, but the breakfast is carried along to the next stand so as to be ready for cooking immediately upon arrival. We store it in the forward end here, which is why we call this the grocery wagon."

On the side opposite to the butcher shop were dozens upon dozens of boxes and crates filled with oranges, apples, grapefruit, fresh vegetables, and bread. Besides, John saw stacks of sacked potatoes, flour, and three huge cans of honey.

As they walked toward the cook tent he noticed heavy wooden chests with hinged lids.

"Dish, glassware, and silverware boxes," Ollie Webb pointed out. He lifted one of the lids. "The dishes are placed in the slits. Other boxes have openings like pigeonholes in a desk. A drinking glass goes into each one of the holes. Then everything is loaded at night aboard what we call the crockery wagons. Oh, yes, a dish breaks now and then, but the average loss isn't much greater than in your kitchen at home."

"Don't forget to give the spud pile a visit," Grant called to John. "Come along, and I'll join you out right now."

"Go ahead," Ollie Webb advised. "You'll see quite a sight there this morning."

CHAPTER VIII

AROUND THE SPUD PILE

I'LL BET you never glimpsed that many ears at one time before," Grant announced, as he and John came into the open space beyond the butcher shop.

A wide strip of canvas had been spread over the ground, and on this was heaped a pile of corn that stood higher than the boy's waist. A dozen or more men in white skullcaps sat at its foot tearing off the green husks and tossing the ears into tubs.

"The corn market would be a more likely name just now," Grant added, "but it's here that potatoes are peeled, and so the spot is always referred to as the 'spud pile.' Got a new flunkey," he said to the huskers. "Sit over there next to Soldier."

Soldier made room for the visitor.

"We're taking the tights off a lot of 'em to-day," he said. "There was a hundred and fifty dozen ears in that stack before we started."

"Goes at it like an old-timer," admired John Dillon, as the newcomer pitched in. "Look out, Race Horse, or you'll be losing your medals."

John thought that a funny name. But he soon learned that most everyone had a "moniker," as the men termed nicknames.

Soldier had been in the war. So had another, but having only one arm he was called "Army." There was "Specs," who wore glasses, and Frenchy and Rosie. A waiter was a "flunkey" and those who washed dishes were called "pearl divers."

"But you want to mosy around Jimmy Whalen's black boys if you're collecting monikers," Soldier advised. "They certainly do hang 'em on quick. A shine with three fingers off his left duke joined out the other day, and they were calling him 'Seven Spot' before he'd been on the job an hour. Then there's one that wears a Norfolk jacket a couple of sizes too small. They dubbed him 'High Pockets.' "

"How about Rocking Horse Slim and the Banjo-eyed Kid?" put in Louis Hicks.

"Remember Population Pete?" asked another. "They decorated him with that because he could always tell you how many folks lived in the town we were in."

"Or claimed he could," grunted John Dillon. "Speaking of the colored brethren, why leave out Nickel Plate, Dead Leg, Wagon Show, Sticks, or Old Shoes?"

"Yes, or Bear," added Soldier. "Wonder what

ever became of him. Jim Whalen used to say that Bear could use up more time tying off quarter-pole jumpers—stalling on the job while the rings were being leveled, than any nigger he ever saw. 'Bear,' he says to him one morning, 'when you die and go to heaven and find there ain't any ropes there, you're going to be in an awful fix.' But Bear got right back at him. He laughed that old buckled-in laugh of his and says, 'De preacher in my home town done prophe-sied that no show nigger's ever goin' to git to heaven, Mr. Jimmy!' "

As they talked, the corn pile gradually flattened. From where John sat, he could look into the cook tent. The flag was still up. From time to time, different gangs of working men came to the long end, breakfasted, and departed.

"Mostly canvas men and drivers," Soldier said. "Sure," he added, when John asked if Mr. Whalen had arrived. "See through there to the bosses' table? The square-shouldered one with the red moustache? That's Mr. Jimmy. Can lick his weight in wildcats, that man can. Just all iron."

"Is the third section in?" somebody inquired.

"Yes, and here they come from the fourth," announced Louis Hicks.

John made out a stream of men and women coming across the pasture in the distance.

"That's the art—I mean the performers," Soldier said.

"Heads up, short-end men!" Grant called from the cook-house back door.

The last ear husked, those at the spud pile hustled into their white coats and took their places in the dining tent.

"Where do you go from here?" Soldier asked John.

"Mr. Rooney said I was to come over to the menagerie."

"All right, see you at dinner, maybe."

And Soldier joined the other waiters in the short end.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE HIPP DEN

AS JOHN approached the menagerie, he saw that it had been completely shut in with side wall. Knots of town people were idling along the stake line. Now and then, when someone passing in or out raised the canvas for a moment, they would stoop down to peer through the openings.

Art Rooney was nowhere in sight. John wondered how he was to get in. He hurried around to the other side. Here he saw a doorway that had been made by hoisting a section of the side wall and tying it off at the eaves. A team of six fine horses was just pulling the last of the cages into the tent.

As John came up, the crowd of onlookers closed in behind the den. Some followed it. But they did not remain long.

"Outside, folks! Outside! Nobody allowed in here!" a man called as he shooed the curious ones back into the open. Then he began dropping the looped-up wall.

But John did not propose to be left outside. Boldly he started for the opening.

"You can't go in there!" he heard someone warn.

He turned to see Jim Ferris and George Norton, boys that he knew very well.

"Oh, I don't know," he returned.

"Bet you can't," snickered Jim. "Anyway, not without getting thrown out on your ear."

The laugh nettled John.

"Watch and see!" he retorted, though in his heart he wasn't sure what was going to happen.

"Dare you," mocked Jim.

"Double it!" added George Norton.

Bravely, John made for the now rapidly closing gap in the canvas.

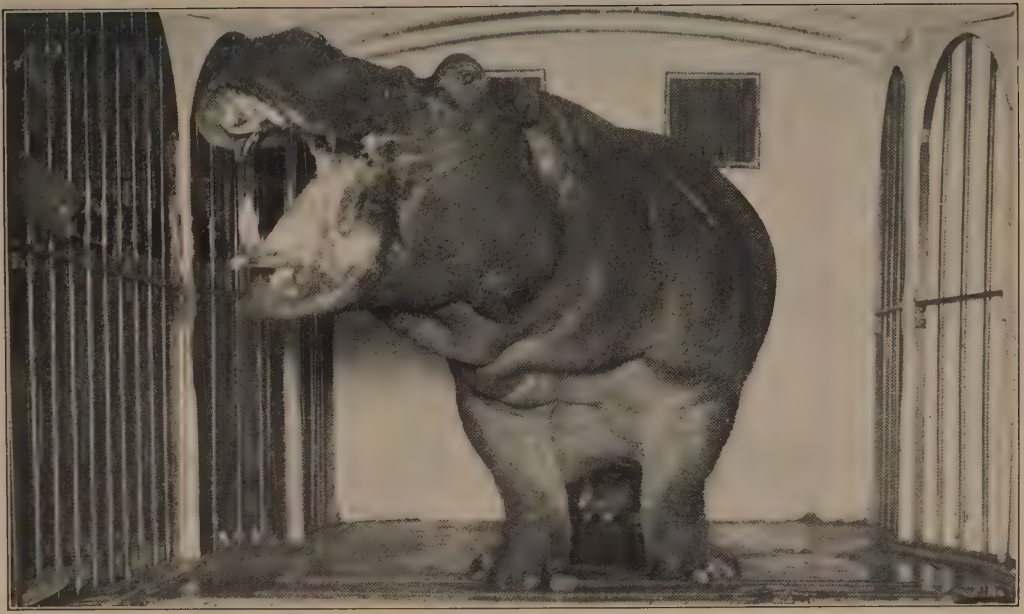
"Out——" began the guard. But luck was with him. Just at that moment Art Rooney passed along inside.

"All right for my friend, there!" he sang out.

"Sure," answered the workingman.

Sticking his tongue in his cheek, John looked back at the two boys, and while they stood with open mouths, sauntered into the forbidden precincts.

"Been over at the spud pile, eh?" the boss animal man said as they walked down the now cage-filled tent. "Well, we'll take a squint inside old Fatima's mouth while we're waiting for the bulls to come up. You see the outer circle of dens



But Fatima did not offer to move. She wanted more.

That water surely had a long way to travel!

isn't placed yet. Teams can handle them only so far, then we use the elephants to round out the oval. You'll see soon as George Denman and his men come in with the herd."

The tarpaulin had been taken off the den of the "Largest Hippopotamus in Captivity," the side boards removed, and the lumbering occupant had emerged from her tank. Unlocking the door at one end, Art Rooney swung himself inside. He patted the big beast's dripping neck with resounding smacks.

"How's the old lady this morning?" he inquired of her. She blinked sleepily. An assistant had followed, bringing a scrubbing brush and a bucket.

"Open up! Open up!" the boss commanded. Slowly the cavernous mouth unfolded to disclose a deep, pink-and-brown-lined throat and four tusks as large as those of a small-sized elephant.

"Got to be scrubbed and scraped every now and then," Art Rooney said, as he took hold of one of them, "but it's the grinders that must be looked after most. Half-chewed hay gets in around the gums, and that has bad results if allowed to remain too long. See the grinders in back here? Six on a side."

He took the brush, dipped it in water and scrubbed the teeth as you would a floor.

"Naw, she doesn't mind—rather likes it—don't you, old honeybunch? You see, it sort of tickles.

And who'll say she doesn't know it's good for her? Can't be much fun to have a toothache in teeth that size. Now that's done, it's time for breakfast."

The keeper of the den had been making balls out of wet bran. These were the size of an apple. Now he tossed one of them into the still open mouth. But Fatima did not offer to move. She wanted more. In went another ball. Then a third.

Now the immense jaws partly shut. The ponderous chops moved up and down in lubberly fashion. It was evident that a hippo was as clumsy at eating as at moving to and from its tank.

"Doesn't get bran mash every day. Only about twice a week," Art Rooney said. "The rest of the time she's got to be contented with hay and now and then some chopped carrots or apples."

Breakfast over, the keeper prodded Fatima with his broom that he might sweep out her cage. She sluffed toward the tank at the farther end, and then, after a little, sank out of sight in the water.

"But how can she breathe?" John wanted to know.

"She doesn't. Just fills her lungs with all the air they'll hold, closes the nose openings, and goes to the bottom. I've known her to stay under for six or seven minutes. In another den, you'll see her baby, Toodles, though he's a pretty fair punk

by now. When he was small I've stood around for a half hour at a time watching her duck him to teach him to stay under. A hipp's nostrils are a good deal the same as a camel's—slit-like and close up the same way. Only a camel shuts his to keep out sand and dirt. But there come the bulls. You remind me, after while, and I'll show you some camels that fought in the big war."

Headed by Old John, with Baby Dolly chained to his side, the long, gray column clanked in through a raised portion of the wall. Two by two, or three by three, they came, until one entire side of the menagerie was lined with the shuffling, dust-colored bodies. As the column came to a halt, the elephant men slid from the heads of the larger ones. Iron stakes were driven and leg chains fastened to the stakes.

Behind the elephants strode the camels; and behind the camels trotted the zebras, as frisky as so many young colts.

"We call the camels the 'humps' and the zebras the 'convicts,'" Art Rooney said. "They're always tethered along these picket ropes down the center of the menagerie—running along as far as the giraffe pen. And say! if you hurry over, you'll be just in time to see the spotted girls come out."

CHAPTER X

"OLD ANDREW"

"OLD ANDREW," the giraffe man, and his helpers were setting up the final section of the iron-screen enclosure that was to serve as a corral for his charges.

"Oh-ho!" he said, as John arrived. "So you want to see my babies, yes? Vell, now we unlock the vagoons. Not so leedle, these houses for my spotted girls—naw, not so leedle. See, the bottoms are made low so they will just miss the ground, and the tops are very high. Steady there, Louisee! Whoa, now!"

As he took the padlock from the door that was nearest them he began to talk to Louisa through the glossy red panels. The door was divided across the center so that it could be opened in two parts. It was the upper half that Andrew threw back first. As he did, a head followed by a long, brown splotched neck gradually emerged.

"That's a nice girl! That's my nice Louisee. Come—we put the leedle rope on now."

He patted her face and then snapped the catch into the halter ring.

"It's so he won't pop his head up too quick and bump it when he comes out," Andrew explained.

A cleated runway slanted from the bottom of the wagon toward the entrance to the corral. Once again Andrew patted Louisa's cheek while he talked to her in low, guttural tones. Slowly he stepped away and backed into the corral. But John saw that he was careful to keep the halter rope held taut and fairly low.

"Now," he nodded.

A helper pulled open the lower half of the door, Andrew gave a quick tug on the rope, Louisa planted her front hoofs on the runway and, in a single bound was inside the enclosure.

Once there, she extended her neck to its full height, pranced about, and stared around the tent with her big, soft brown eyes, as much as to say, "Well, what place is this? I've never seen this spot before!"

Annie having been coaxed into the other half of the corral, Old Andrew invited John to inspect the inside of the "vagoons." Everywhere—on sides, ends, and at the top—they were heavily padded with canvas upholstering as thick as that on an overstuffed sofa. The floors were bedded down with two feet of straw.

"So she can't hurt himself in the night," Andrew

pointed out. He also showed John how, by lying down in the straw, the animals had ample room in which to hold their necks erect.

"Foolish peoples sometimes stop and ask me how we carry the giraffes so's their heads won't bump against the tunnels when we go through on the train," Andrew chuckled. "Now you can tell them."

By this time both Louisa and Annie had ceased to prance about. Now they were hanging their long necks over the corral top and sniffing at Andrew's hat.

"They want drink," he said. "Come, you will help. Lots of boys water elephants, but I never knew one to help water my spotted girls before." He seemed as pleased as John with the idea.

A minute later, Annie had thrust her long dark nose into the bucket that the boy held up to her. He could see the swallows ripple down the underside of her throat. That water surely had a long way to travel!

"Are they very old?" he asked.

"Annie was born in 1914 and Louisee two years after—both at Bridgeport. I raise them both. Yes, both are my leedle girls. Tom—he was the father—is dead; and Mary, their mamma, too. Tom was seventeen feet high up. Louisee will be very tall. She is still growing. Maybe did you know that giraffes never make any sound at all?

Never. Not even when they die. I held Tom's head in my lap when he go. He cry lots. Great big tears run down his face. But no sound. Except from me. I cry a leedle then."

Andrew filled the canvas-like boxes that swung at the corral top with hay.

"Clover," he said. "They like that. Also they like corn, oats, crackers, and biscuits. This afternoon, both will have tea. You think I not tell truth? Look, I show you."

He took John into a curtained-off space between the two wagons. There he opened a box and got out a tin of black tea.

"Sure," he said, "it is for Annie and Louisee. I take a bucket, mix oats and maybe some corn together with warm water. Then I put in a big pinch of tea and a leedle salt. One day I forget and leave out the tea. That Annie she won't eat a bite!

"What you suppose they get for dessert? Onion! See here in the sack? I peel him and cut him up in pieces, like apple."

But what most interested John was a plump black crow that perched on one of the wagon wheels.

"I catch him one morning on the lot," Andrew said. "He's got bum wing. But eat! Corn, corn, corn—all the time corn! Not good for anything except to stuff himself with corn!"

He lifted the bird from the wheel and stroked his head.

"I got rabbit too. Here, rabbit," he called, bending down.

A brown-backed sage bunny hopped into view.

"Got him in the grass one morning. Sure, right here in the menagerie. He shake all over, he was so scared. Now he sleep every night in the vagoon. He no good for nothing, either. Just eat."

The crow jumped back to the wheel, and, spreading his good wing, began to make strange noises.

"He smell the goat," Andrew laughed. "He don't like him. Sure, I got a goat too. Here, Goat; here, Goat!" he called as one calls a dog. A small black and white form butted through the far end of the canvas curtain.

"You good for nothing!" Andrew said. "Just like the rest. Eat, eat, eat! And bananas! He keeps me broke buying him bananas. What you good for, anyhow? I guess I kill you to-day—what you say?"

But the goat only wagged his stumpy tail. The harsher Andrew talked, the faster it moved.

"Just like a pup. Follow me around everywhere, always wagging his tail."

"What's his name?" John asked, as he patted the silky head.

"Just Goat. I just call him Goat."

"All right!" Art Rooney called, as they came from between the wagons. "Here's your chance to see Old John earn his breakfast."

With a good-bye to Andrew, the boy followed the boss animal man down the tent.

CHAPTER XI

PLACING THE CAGES

STRAIGHT ahead loomed the mammoth bulk of the elephant that had piloted the herd into the menagerie. A wide canvas pad had been strapped to the front of his head.

"That's George Denman working him," Art Rooney said. "Now you'll see how we place the dens in exact position."

A half-dozen cages had already been lined, front to end, along the side wall. Another was about to be moved up.

The pole had been left in, just as when the team was unhitched. Two "steerers" held the gooseneck to guide it.

"Come on, John! Move it up, John!" ordered George Denman. Slowly the big bull's push pad came in contact with the rear of the cage, and slowly the clucking wheels turned forward.

Now a man pulled the king pin and the pole was whisked out and tossed against the side wall. Those who had guided the gooseneck leaped to the front wheels.

"Hi! Once more, John!"

Again the massive head pressed home. The men at the wheels cramped them inward—then outward. A last shove from Old John, and the cage had been pushed within a hand's breadth of its neighbor. So to the next, and the next.

"What makes that funny noise?" John asked. "My dad says circus wagons have a sound that's different from any other kind."

"With the cages it's the carved-wood webbing set in between the spokes. Merle Evans, who's our band master, says it's like what makes a fiddle make tones. Sort of a sounding board, I suppose. You listen again when George starts to place the next lot of cages down at the back end."

For, having finished one batch, the man in the puttees was walking rapidly toward the opposite end of the tent.

But Old John was in no such hurry. As he left the last cage he had spied a half-flake of hay near the camel picket line, and had gone over to steal a bite of breakfast. There he stood, push pad on nose, munching his find. George Denman had reached the next cage to be placed. Without so much as glancing back, he gave the command:

"Hi, there, John! Ready John!"

No answer. No John.

"Hey! Where are you?"

The boss turned back.

"John! John! Hurry up there, you old sinner!"

The gray mountain moved, though very reluctantly. He caught up what remained of the hay.

"Here comes John bringing his 'dukie' with him," sang out one of the men at the gooseneck.

George Denman came forward to meet the lumbering worker, giving him a poke in the side with his hook.

"Shake a foot, John! Want to make us late to-day?"

The big fellow squealed as if making answer. Then he put his head against the cage.

"Come on, John! Move it up. Once more! Ho!"

The head receded. Then, his "dukie" of hay still dangling in his trunk, John moved on to the den of the "Only Living Armored Rhinoceros."

"Talks back all the time," Art Rooney laughed. "After you've been around him day after day you get to think he's the next thing to human. It's as though he was saying, 'Aw, Gee! What's all the fuss about? Can't you give a fellow a chance to get something to eat?' "

"What did the man mean by a 'dukie'?" John wanted to know.

"That's circus slang for a lunch. You see, when the show makes a long Sunday run and so misses a meal in the cook house, Ollie Webb puts up box

lunches. We call them 'dukies.' Of course, 'most any elephant will grab a dukie of hay, but John's the only bull I ever saw bring one along with his feet.

"It was one day last season. We were placing cages, and as the old boy passed the camel picket line, he come on to a whole half bale of timothy. It was too good to leave behind, so, after gathering up all he could in his trunk, he began sliding his front feet along over the ground. Here he comes down the line, pushing a good quarter of a bale ahead of him, and squealing at every shove. I thought George Denman was going to fall over, laughing at him. Oh, by the way, here are the camels I wanted to show you," the boss suddenly exclaimed as they turned toward the picket rope. "See those rangy fellows with the brands on their necks? We bought them from the British, following the war. Used to carry light artillery."

"There's SOS on that yellow one," John made out.

"That's what I thought at first. But what look like S's are really 5's. He was No. 505. He and the two just beyond him were with Allenby. We still have the gun saddles and trappings that came with them."

"Camels can go longer without water than any other animal, can't they?" John asked.

"Most folks think so, but as a matter of fact, a

giraffe or an eland has them beat. And I'll tell you something else you may not know: The real definition of a dromedary is not a camel with one hump, but a camel that is specially bred for speed. May have two humps and still be a dromedary."

"How old do they get to be, Mr. Rooney?"

"Can't answer that for a certainty, but Joe was better than forty when he died last year. Camels are a great deal like mules—you don't often see a dead one. But there's always a baby or two around.

"We sometimes tie them along the stakes to give them a bit of sun," the boss added, as he and John stooped under the side wall. "There! What do you think of those for a couple of busters?"

Two woolly calves were wobbling about on stilt-like legs between the guy ropes. At sight of Art Rooney, they began to bleat like sheep.

"Want to get back to mother," he said. "Slide in between them and see how soft their noses are. Just like velvet."

"Are they twins?" John asked as he caught the halter snaps.

"They'd pass for twins right enough. Truth is, they aren't, though they were born only two days apart. They'll be three months old this week. One of the mothers didn't treat her baby very well, so we gave them both to the other to nurse. So

far as I can see, she doesn't know which is her own and which isn't.

"Animal mothers are queer sometimes," he continued as they returned to the menagerie, "Won't have anything to do with their own flesh. That's especially the case with lions. On the other hand, there's Nellie. Never was a better lioness than Nellie. Always gentle with her cubs. Here she is in this den here."

The lithe, tawny animal ran her soft cheek along the bars of the cage, much like a house cat that seeks to be stroked.

"You can tell by her eyes that she'd make a good mother. All the difference in the world in the looks of different lions and tigers. Over here is a lion with cross eyes. He's a good scout, but without style and clumsier than a mud turtle. We call him Joe Doaks—you know, sort of a rube. That big fellow farther along is Buster. He's a tough guy. Always looking for a fight. He usually starts to holler before the tarpaulin is taken off his cage. You can hear him halfway across the lot."

"Can you tell his voice?"

"Easy enough. Lions' voices are as unlike as people's. What's more, Buster here knows my pipes the full length of the menagerie. He'll hear me and start roaring. Wants his den opened up.

A wise bird, but a tough one. A fine specimen, though. See how slim his tail is? That's the way to tell a finely bred lion. Those with the barrel tails, like Joe Doaks, for example, are the common garden variety."

As they left the den John heard someone calling his name. It was Happy Jack Snellen.

"How do you suppose Jim Whalen is going to get the big top up with you fooling around this old cat house?" the laying-out boss demanded. "He's just been telling me that one of his assistants is down at the cars sick. I says, 'I've got just the duck to take his place.' 'Will he stick?' asks Jim. 'Couldn't have put up the menagerie without him,' says I. 'Bring on your terrier,' answers Jim, 'and let's look him over!' "

"Dern it, and here I was just going to offer him a job as a cameleer," declared Art Rooney.

"Too late. John's going to join the muslin department."

"Are they twins?" John asked.

"Follow me long enough, Jonathan, and you'll wear diamonds."

CHAPTER XII

WORKING FOR MR. JIMMY

GRINNING from ear to ear, John followed Happy Jack Snellen to where an army of men were spreading big top canvas. Directing them, he saw the red-moustached boss that Soldier had pointed out from the spud pile. Happy led the way to where he stood.

"Here's old trouper John Foster, himself," he announced.

Putting arm akimbo, the boss canvas man cocked one eye and viewed the newcomer critically.

"Shiver my quarter poles if I don't think he'll fill the job fine, Happy," he boomed after a moment's inspection. "You say he doesn't care about sleep?"

"Been up since 2 o'clock and hasn't flopped yet," vouched the other.

"That's in his favor," Jim Whalen nodded. "You see, my hearty, us circus folks never sleep during the season—just nap once in a while, and then do our real snoozing in the winter time. And you don't think you'd turn out to be a sunny-day showman? Don't know what that is, maybe?

Well, it's a dude that works fine as long as the sun warms his back and then wants his time just because the rain runs down his neck for a couple of weeks."

"I like getting in the rain," John maintained stoutly.

"That's the spirit!" Jim Whalen exclaimed, and he thrust out a broad, square hand. "Follow me long enough, Jonathan, and you'll wear diamonds. Maybe the first day though, we'd best just let you stand around and get the hang of things. What do you say?"

John assented. But he tried to be very serious. It was a fine game they were playing, and he liked it. What was more, he liked the brawny boss canvasman.

"It's a go. Now, you just kick around all you want, and if anybody says anything, you just tell 'em you're working for Jim Whalen. After while, I'll let you go over to the stake-and-chain wagon and fetch me the key to the big top. Ahoy, there Sis! Here's a new man for you."

As Jim Whalen stood chuckling, John crossed the canvas toward where the one called "Sis" was straightening tackle.

"Need just such a one!" Sis called back. Then, as the boy came up, "Shake a flipper there and clear that main-falls rope!"

Quickly John stepped to the base of the giant

pole and took hold of a big hemp cable that passed down through the bail ring.

"Well, skin me if you haven't got the right one!" exclaimed the assistant boss. "Say! Guess this is an old-timer you've just hired!"

"Sure," Happy Jack answered back; "used to work for me on menagerie."

Of all the fun John Foster had that day, none was finer than helping Sis Hopkins. Together the two stretched the falls rope, the boy learned how to tie a circus half-hitch, and the good-natured assistant even showed him the peculiar loop and tie by which the laced middles were made fast to the ridge rope and the bail rings.

John wondered how it really felt to put up in the rain. For to-day all was brilliant with sunshine. The sky was a robin's-egg blue pierced by the even bluer poles that were soon to feel the weight of the tons upon tons of weather-grayed canvas.

He saw how much bigger everything was, compared with the menagerie. And he discovered something else that he had not noted before: the center poles were larger near the middle than they were at the base.

"Sure," Sis nodded. "Ninety-nine out of a hundred towners would bet you money that they taper out all the way down. Instead, they're shaved at the bottom and bellied from a fourth to

a half the way up. That's the point of greatest strain and so has to be strongest.

"Great set of poles," he continued, waving down the line of them. "Go take a look at the one that's nearest the menagerie. It's called the king pole."

John walked along the canvas and stood looking up at its great height. Then he spanned the pole with his hands and guessed it to be at least three feet around. Even more girth than that, up there where it bellied.

"See you're taking a squint at Old Bill," Jim Whalen said, coming up. "Lad, there's a spar for you! Had a lot of king poles in my day, but there never was a nobler one than Bill."

"Why is it called the king pole, Mr. Whalen?"

"Always the first one up and the last to come down. Once it's in the air, we use it to raise the second pole. Then it lowers that same second pole when we tear down at night—bears the first and the last strain, as you might say. Done any lacing yet? Here, I'll show you the trick."

They went to where two broad middle pieces had been laid together.

"You see, to keep the weather out, we have to lap the edges, and that's done with the lacings. Here, now, on this left side, you have a row of loops made of this small rope. These holes on the other side are the eyelets. You take a loop and thread it through an eyelet—this wise. Pull

John took hold of a big hemp cable that passed down through the bail ring.

"You take a loop and thread it through an eyelet—this wise."

it tight, lay it back across, put the next loop through it, take the next loop, and put it through the next eyelet, and so on—to the ridge rope. Just as simple as lacing your shoes, once you get the hang of it."

It was while John was threading the looped ropes through the eyelets that George Denman hailed them from beyond the stake line.

"Haven't got a good man you can spare for a while, have you, Jim?"

The boss canvasman scratched his head and looked around.

"Don't believe I've got a one," he answered. "Unless—what about Foster here? Think he'd do?"

"Just the ticket."

"All right, take him along. Remember, though, I'm only just loaning him to you. He's got to fetch over the big top keys later on."

CHAPTER XIII

THE ELEPHANT LINE-UP

"I WAS pretty sure from what Art Rooney was telling me that you'd like to see how we wash the babies," George Denman explained, as he and John made for the menagerie.

"I should say I would."

Two men supplied with buckets and sponges were already at work when they reached the line-up. Walking along it, John counted twelve baby elephants.

"And every one of those punks has got to have his face scrubbed every morning," Boss Denman said. "You see a punk elephant hasn't got much sense. Always throwing dust on his back. That's fair enough, because it keeps them cool and shoos the flies away. But they don't stop to take any sort of aim. They're just as liable to toss dirt in their eyes as they are on their heads. It lands on their winkers, they try to rub it off with the ends of their trunks or by rubbing against one another, and then it gets in their eyes. Next thing you know, they're crying, and the tears make chapped cheeks. Follow me?"

John nodded.

"Oh, Sailor. Bring me a bucket and sponge. I've saved Dolly for you. Get hold of her ear. That's it—hang on tight. I'll hold the water."

John took the soaked sponge and began to dab.

"Harder!" instructed George Denman. "You've got to give it plenty of elbow. That's the stuff. Now, some more water, and then sponge her eyes."

To the boy's surprise, Dolly made not the slightest objection.

"They're just like kids," the boss declared. "Some stand still and some won't. Marcella, over there, hollers and squeals all the time she's being washed; and when you start on her ears you'd think she was being murdered."

"Why, Dolly's got hair on her head!" John exclaimed.

"On her back, too. And did you ever notice an elephant's eyelashes? Some of them stick out pretty near half a foot. Lots of folks don't ever see that. In the jungles, there are tribes that make rings out of the hair from an elephant's tail. You could make a flock of them out of Bingo's. Look back here—pretty nearly eight inches long."

While the babies were undergoing the face scrubbing, the older bulls stood munching the hay that was strewn along the entire line.

"They eat all lay," George Denman said. "That's why you'll sometimes hear them called

the 'hay-burners.' Know what the darkey children call them down South? 'De ol' rubber mules.' "

"That's a whizz of a name!" John laughed. They walked toward Old John.

"Is he the oldest of all?" the boy asked.

"No, John's only forty-seven. Queen back there is sixty-two."

"But John's the king, isn't he? I mean, the one that bosses all the rest of the elephants."

George Denman's eyes twinkled.

"What gave you that notion?"

"Somebody told me, sir. And about policemen elephants, too, that make all the rest of the herd keep in place."

"Bunk!" the boss snorted. "Just pure bunk. Yes, I've heard that sort of stuff too. But you want to get a true story about the circus, don't you? Well, then, take it from me, the only 'kings' and 'cops' around a bunch of bulls are the men who have charge of them. At least, that's my observation, and I've been handling elephants for more than forty years.

"Of course, there are some that are more dependable than others," he went on. "Old John, for one—Romey, for another. That's why John is at this end of the line-up and Romey at the other. Candy butchers, animal men, canvas men, and the like, have to make short cuts in and out

under the side wall during the day. They can pass John or Romey and take no chance of being slapped by a trunk."

"But are the rest all bad elephants?" John asked.

"Not by any means. A lot of them are as gentle as kittens. But don't you ever be foolish enough to pass through any line-up of bulls unless somebody who's working on elephants is with you. Never can tell when you might be kicked or faked by a tail or a trunk."

As they talked, Dolly had squeezed herself halfway under Old John's legs and was now scratching her back by moving to and fro against his deep-seamed body.

"He don't mind," George Denman said. "Likes babies. He and Dolly are together all day and sleep in the same car at night. Jenny over there is another that's crazy about the little ones. Can't have too many around. I've often seen that Rosie youngster asleep square under her feet, with her eating away and half burying the punk with hay. But Nellie won't have them near. Albert—he's that biggest elephant—seems to like them well enough, only they make him nervous. Keeps backing away. You know—just like some old bachelor uncles."

"Were any of the babies born here?"

"Nope. All jungle bred, and none of them dwarfs, either. Just young ones is all; from two

to four years old. I've seen a lot of punks grow up in my time. Take John: he was only around eleven years when we first got acquainted. Got quite a history, has that old-timer."

"Could you tell me some of it, Mr. Denman?"

"Why, yes—part of it, anyway. But let's go over to my wagon. Less noise out there."

CHAPTER XIV

THE STORY OF OLD JOHN

SKIRTING Old John's end of the line-up, they passed out of the menagerie to enter an adjoining yard-like place fenced in by side wall. A low, striped tent, numerous boxes, buckets, and washtubs, and a wagon with a fly-awning were distributed in methodical fashion within the enclosure.

Inside the tent, John caught a glimpse of cots, several tables piled with uniforms, a number of camp stools, and a barrel of drinking water. Towels hung here and there, and near them was a washstand made from a long board fitted with holes just large enough to hold the rims of basins. The board rested on jacks.

"That's the elephant top," George Denman told him. "It's where my men rest when they are not on duty, wash up, and put on their uniforms. Pretty nearly every department has its rest tent or wagon. This is my wagon, here."

He led the way to the shady spot made by the awning. Inside the wagon, the boy saw a trunk, hooks hung with hats, caps, and a gold-braided

coat, and a table littered with books and papers. On the walls were several pictures in frames.

But they did not go in. Instead, the boss motioned his visitor to a canvas-backed chair and seated himself in another.

"I can't be sure of the first part of Old John's story," he began, "but I can tell you the way it was handed to me. Ever read about the days when the old Forepaugh circus and James A. Bailey were fighting each other for territory? No? Well, that was back in the early '80's; both of them rivals and battling for business from town to town, each one claiming that his was the only show worth seeing. Naturally enough, both were always on the lookout for something brand new in the way of attractions.

"With this idea in view, Mr. Bailey sent to Siam one winter and bought a sure-enough white elephant. Now, a white bull isn't really white at all, but only a dirty yellow color. Just the same, a genuine one is a big card for any show. So when Adam Forepaugh heard that his rival was going to have one out against him, he was pretty much worked up. They say he did a lot of thinking. Then what do you suppose he did?"

"Sent to Siam for one too!" guessed John.

"Siam, your grandmother! He hot-footed an agent to Liverpool. There he had him buy a young elephant and have it sandpapered from

John took the soaked sponge and began to dab.

"He's just a working elephant now, and there never was a better one."

"The wreath was put where it belonged.'

trunk to tail. Next he bleached the hide with peroxide and then added some sort of whitening. The agent came home with a bull that was as white as your shirt! But the whole thing was kept mum.

"Well, sir, when the two shows started out in opposition in the spring, there was nothing to it. You've got to remember that was a long time ago —back in the days when grocerymen put sand in sugar, small shows exhibited sea lions as mermaids, and folks stood for all sorts of fakes and graft. So, though Mr. Bailey's elephant was the real thing, it couldn't stand up against Adam Forepaugh's manufactured one. Just wasn't white enough to suit the public's notion!

"Mr. Bailey became so disgusted that he stopped advertising his prize, which was all Forepaugh wanted. After that, he made some announcement about 'returning his white elephant to its owner, old King Guz-ma-guz,' or something like that, and let the sandpapered one return to its rightful color.

"And that fake-up, peroxided bull," George Denman concluded, "was, according to the best reports obtainable, that same Old John who stands over there in the menagerie."

"Whilliker jimmeny!" whistled John.

"Myself," the boss went on, "didn't get acquainted with him until several years after. In

1890, to be exact. Only he wasn't called 'Old' John then, but 'John L. Sullivan.' The circus bills announced him as 'the world's only and greatest boxing elephant.' You see, the real John L. was champion then, and he was named after him. I can see that bull now, lumbering up on his hind legs, a diamond belt hooked into a red, white, and blue rosette buckled around him, gloves as big as buckets tied to his fore feet, lunging away at his sparring partner. How the crowds used to yell!"

Old John's historian took off his hat, mopped his brow, and smiled at the picture he had brought up after so many years. The sun, now nearing noonday height, had slipped around the awning's edge. The boss hitched his chair farther into the shade. Several of his men had come out to the wash basins and were lathering their necks and faces with big bars of white soap. Another was shaving at a mirror that hung from a quarter pole. Still another lay flat on his back across a cot, strumming a guitar.

"Never was a greater hero than the old Irish champion," the boss elephant man went on, "so it was only natural that John L. the bull made a whaling hit whenever he appeared in the ring. Of course, he did other stunts too: like dancing on the top of a tub, pyramiding, playing at tenpins, only it was ninepins in those days—all the routine that every well-trained elephant is taught to do.

"From the Forepaugh show he went to the amalgamation when it and the Sells Brothers outfit joined up in '98. I think that was the year. Swear if I don't believe I'm getting old—don't remember like I used to. Wait, I'll get my book."

He stepped into the wagon, rummaged the tray of a trunk, and returned, bringing a worn-backed leather volume.

"Yes, here it is," he said as he turned the pages, "'John went to Forepaugh show in 1898.' He trouped with it until the Ringlings bought the show and they've owned him ever since. They're all in here," the boss added, tapping the book. "John and two hundred others that I've handled at one time or another—names, ages, and when the dead ones died. See this? Here's John's page. Notice how it starts off?—'1890—about eleven years old.' That, you see, would make him around forty-seven now."

"Does John still box?" the boy asked.

"Jiggeldy Moses, no! Goes in tournament now and then, but he hasn't been a performer since 1900. He's just a working elephant now, and there never was a better one. Always keeps his head. A little slow, maybe, but dead sure. Got too many friends, though. Listen!"

He shook his head despairingly and pointed toward the menagerie side wall. At times a breeze bellied it off the ground, and when it did you could

see the post-like legs and slowly swinging tails of the elephants at Old John's end of the line.

"That's him farthest along," George Denman said. "You can always tell by his short hind legs, for, more than any of the rest, he slopes off behind. Hear the voice calling him?"

The boy heard,

"John! JOHN!"

"One of the candy butchers making him crack for ice cream. He has a leaning to colic, and those sweet stuffs don't help any. But, Jiggeldy Moses, I get tired of jawing. They will feed him when I'm not around."

But by now the boss was once more smiling. He began to chortle.

"Happen to read about the time we took John on the hike to the monument of Old Bet? That was in 1922. The ice cream was what made me think of it. How the old sinner did gorge himself! The newspapers called it a pilgrimage. Huh! It was a four days' stuffing bout for John!"

Again he shook his head with an air of resignation. Then he started the story.

CHAPTER XV

OLD JOHN'S PILGRIMAGE

IN CASE you don't happen to know," George Denman related, "Old Bet was the name of the first elephant ever brought to America. There is a monument erected to her memory at Somers, New York, where, something like a hundred years ago, she was exhibited in a barn.

"It was while we were playing at Madison Square Garden that it was decided to send one of our bulls up state to sort of pay the herd's respects to the departed one. Those in charge of the programme picked on Old John.

"A Sunday was selected for the start. I'll never forget that day. A sky as blue as this, and sunshine as warm. Now, you ought to know that, after a winter in quarters, an elephant's feet get mighty tender. Won't stand up under long marches over paved streets until they start to toughen up with use. So I had boots made for John. What I wanted was a dark, oiled cloth—you know, the kind that's used in making slickers. But all I could find by the piece was a deep purple. So purple they had to be.

"Well, on the Sunday I'm telling of, John sluffed out of the Garden into Twenty-sixth Street and over it to Fifth Avenue. You saw him following me in the menagerie this morning? That's the way he followed then—sloughing along, me three or four lengths ahead of him on the sidewalk.

"There are lots of sights in New York. There have been a thousand parades on Fifth Avenue. But, Jiggeldy Moses! who ever saw a three-ton elephant walking up it, all by himself of a Sunday morning, wearing purple goloshes! It wasn't any time at all until a crowd was following at his tail. Promenaders going the opposite way rounded to look and then trained in at the rear. Folks going home from church turned their cars and joined in the procession.

"As we neared Forty-second Street, the newspaper photographers wanted to take a picture. But the light wasn't right where John was.

" 'How about the Library steps over there?' I asked. 'Fine,' said they.

"So I made for the broad flight of stone risers that lead up to the Public Library doors on the Fifth Avenue side. Of course, John followed. He'd follow me anywhere, I guess—to Jericho, if I told him. Up he came, between the big stone lions. They didn't mean anything to him, who was used to sure enough ones.

"Meantime, the crowd grew thicker and thicker.

After the pictures were snapped, I had to make a way for him as we came back to the street. Naturally, he interrupted traffic. But there's not much of that on Fifth Avenue of a Sunday morning. Besides, no one seemed to mind. Folks always like elephants. Everywhere they like them. And especially Old John.

"At the point where Forty-second Street crosses the Avenue, the policeman in the signal tower gave us a hail."

"Did he stop you?" John asked breathlessly.

"Didn't even try. Just waved down to us. I halted John at the foot of the tower.

"'Trunk, John! Trunk!' I told him. Of course he couldn't reach to where the officer was —not by a good deal. But that didn't matter. The copper leaned out of his window and made as if to shake hands. The crowd laughed, and we moved on.

"Somewhere about Seventieth Street—I forget just which street it was now—we turned east and entered Madison Avenue. You say you've never been in New York? Well, along about where I'm telling you of, Madison Avenue is not overly wide. As you go north on it, there are cross streets—lots and lots of them: streets packed tight on both sides with houses and shops. You might say it's something like solid walled flumes running into a bigger one—the biggest being Madison Avenue.

Over the shops, and here and there between them, many people live—mothers and fathers and children. Heaps of children. But never a front yard and not many back ones. So the children play on the sidewalks, and, on Sundays, when there's not much traffic, in the streets.

"Get the layout?" George Denman asked. "Here, I'll mark it off for you." With the point of a bull hook he traced a rude diagram on the ground.

"Now, just imagine John coming along Madison Avenue, which is this longest and thickest mark. I'm on the sidewalk and he's in the street, hiking behind me. Following him, and jamming the Avenue from wall to wall—people on foot, boys on skates, autos creeping and honking, all packed together like fish in a net. Overhead, folks hanging out of every window we passed.

"Now we began crossing the mouths of the side streets in which the children were playing. Of course, they had been more or less readied-up by the racket of the auto horns that had come to them from over the roofs. Then, looking toward Madison Avenue, they'd see Old John heave into view.

"Did they run? Jiggeldy Moses! Balls, bats, marbles—everything left behind! An avalanche of yells and kids making straight for that old sinner, John!

"It was the same thing, right and left, street

after street, until there must have been a million of them. You've read about the youngsters that followed the Piper? I hadn't thought of it since I was a boy, until then. It was just like that. If it had been any other bull but John I'd have been pretty nervous. But John's always sure—slow but sure. Now and then, though, he'd get too blamed slow. That was when the kids would start to feed him. Peanuts here, apples there. Of course, he'd stop for more.

"'JOHN!' I'd holler. Then he'd march again. Soon the youngsters got on to his name.

"'John,' they'd call. 'Good old John!' And feed him more stuff. They hung to his tail. They pulled at his ears. They tried to ride on his toes. Why a dozen or more weren't stepped on, I'm still trying to guess. But not a one got hurt. Come to think of it nothing happened to those that followed the Piper, did it? Dern me if I remember though."

"No, sir, nothing did," the boy said, "except that they never went home."

"Well, glory be, this million did. And I'm bound to own that I felt a good deal relieved when we finally left them behind.

"That night, we bedded John down in a livery stable somewhere off One Hundred and Seventy-seventh Street. There wasn't much in the place besides the owner, a three-legged goat, a white

horse, and plenty of hay for John. Yes, there was, too. I almost forgot!"

The boss laughed and then wiped his eyes.

"There was a covered delivery wagon that had been rolled in for over Sunday. We had a little trouble getting John into the stable. Bulls are like that. They want to smell around a bit first, especially if they have to tackle a board floor, which was the kind that was in the stable.

"While we were coaxing him, we heard a voice coming from inside the wagon. Sort of mutterings and groans, and now and then a word or two; like a fellow who's having bad dreams. And I guess that must have been the case. For just as John started in through the door, a man's head popped up from the wagon bed. He took one look, let out a yell, dove through the back, and ran as tight as he could go! I guess nobody could blame him for thinking he was 'seeing things.'

"It took three days to reach Somers, and the goloshes were worn out long before then," George Denman went on. "Everywhere, along the country roads, and in towns and villages through which we passed, people who had heard of John's coming were waiting to greet him. Children came with flowers, or garlands made of blossoms to hang around his neck. There were cookies and candy aplenty, and one old lady had made him a cake!

"On the third night, he was housed in grand

style in a big barn on a country estate that a lady had offered by sending a messenger on to meet him. There was hay, bran mash, doughnuts, and ice cream for the old sinner! Then, the following day, John marched into Somers.

"A local brass band led the procession to the column that supports the carved image of Old Bet. Once there, there was speech-making and more eats for John. He didn't give a hang about the orations, but he sure did put away the sweet stuff. Dexter Fellows and Lester Thompson had come on from New York to represent the show, and they'd brought a wreath as big as an elephant tub along with them. The idea was to have John take the wreath in his trunk and hang it near the foot of the monument. But what do you suppose that old rascal did when he was handed the hoop? Dropped it square over Dexter Fellows's head! That come pretty nearly breaking up the meeting. But, after several tries, he seemed to get on to what was wanted, and the wreath was put where it belonged.

"That afternoon, we carried John back to New York in a motor truck. It took me a week to get him over a bad case of colic. But he sure did have a marvelous spree. Jiggeldy Moses!" Denman suddenly exclaimed, looking up at the sun. "Must be dinner time. Let's be getting over to the cook house."

CHAPTER XVI

A HALF DOZEN THINGS

"HOW did you cure Old John?" the boy asked, as they left the wagon.

"Oh, just gave him some colic drops —same as I always do. You've got to play tricks to get him to take them, though. That particular time, I took a banana, hollowed it out a little, and put the drops inside. You see the odor of a banana is so strong that it sort of out-smells the medicine. That method usually fools him."

"I guess John's the wisest elephant of all, isn't he, Mr. Denman?"

"Huh! That's like asking a fellow who's the wisest man he knows. Elephants, like folks, are wise in some ways and mighty foolish in others. But taking them bull for bull, I believe Queen has the best head in the herd. You've got to remember that she's past sixty and still a performer. Takes awful good care of herself, does that Queen elephant. Always keeps about the same shape and weight. John eats too much and drinks too much. Every so often he gets a water belly—swells out like a barrel.

"Now, you can't blame the punks if they hog themselves when they aren't watched. But John's old enough to know better. Ever get around the water wagon to see them drink? Ought to, sometime. Lots of difference in the way they water up. Mostly, though, a full-grown elephant will suck water halfway up the length of the trunk. That would be about five gallons. Then he puts the end in his mouth and lets the contents slowly gurgle down his throat. But that's not always the way. At the beginning or toward the end of a season we sometimes run on to a frosty morning. The water is pretty cold. So, to warm it to his taste, an old bull will hold the water in his mouth, then draw it back into his trunk. He may do this a couple of times before he finally swallows it.

"Then there are what we call dainty drinkers. Bessie is one of them. Simply won't be hurried, and seems to take only about a gallon of water in her trunk at a time. You see, we always keep the elephants in the same position in the line-up. For example, Dutch, Modock, Bessie, Judy, and Hattie make up a performing herd. They stand together and drink together. When we take them out to the tank wagon the others always have to wait on Bessie. She's always behind—like some slow eaters you've probably seen at table."

A continuous stream of circus men and women was going to and from the cook tent as George

Denman and John descended the slope. Many were reading small sheets of paper. The boy heard one say, "Whoopee! Look at this for a Sunday run—five hundred and forty-two miles!"

"Hello!" the boss remarked. "New route card out to-day. We'll get a couple."

He straddled a guard rope and went up to a green-painted wagon with the word "Commissary" lettered across one side. From an end window a man was distributing the cards.

Returning, the boss handed one to John.

"There are the different stands for the next four weeks," he said. "The show gets them out once a month so you can send them home and the folks know where to write you."

At the top of the card was the name of the circus printed in red, blue, and gold. Beneath it followed a list of towns, and opposite each one was the date of exhibition, the railroad to be used, and the length of the run.

"Well, see you're all fixed to troupe," someone called from a nearby tent. "Got a route card in your kick."

John looked across to see the commissary chief.

"Come on in," he beckoned.

"Go ahead," nodded George Denman. "I'll see you after while."

The boy crossed to the tent. Two other men were inside.

"This is my office," Ollie Webb said, adding, "Mr. Warrell and Mr. Hathaway, John—and you'd better look out for both of them."

The men eyed him with quiet smiles.

"Better look out for Mr. Jimmy, that's who you'd better be looking out for," warned Fred Warrell. "What about that key to the big top?"

"Key to the big top?" repeated John, looking puzzled.

"Sure. Didn't Jim Whalen tell you to come back and he'd send you over to the stake-and-chain wagon for it?"

"Yes, sir, he did!" the boy exclaimed, suddenly remembering. "I'm awful sorry. I'll go right now."

"Here, I'll not stand for having John ragged," protested Carl Hathaway. "He looks like too good a scout. They're just trying to frame you."

The others chuckled.

"Old soft-hearted Carlos," Ollie Webb said.

"Then, isn't there any key?" John wanted to know.

"Of course not. That's just a job that's put up on a newcomer. Sending him for it, or a left-handed sledge hammer."

"Remember the goofey guy that hired out to Jim last season?" Fred Warrell recalled. "The one they nicknamed Shakespeare? He hadn't been on the lot a day until somebody had sent him

to the red ticket wagon to get the keys to the bail rings. Hutch made as if to rummage around, and then remembered they'd been left down at the cars. Off the chump went to the runs to hunt up John McLachlan. He sent him back to me, and I sent him over to you, didn't I, Ollie?"

"He was pretty nearly out of gas when he got over here to my tent," the other grinned.

"Well, finally, somebody handed him an old door key. He'd been gone most of the morning, and when he got back to the big top, all Jim said was, 'Too late. I bit 'em open three hours ago.'"

"Guess we'd better be getting in, or we'll have the flag pulled on us," Carl Hathaway said, when the story had been told. "Having dinner with us, John?"

"Of course he is," Ollie Webb answered. "And supper too."

Fred Warrell joining them, they went into the cook tent. But this time John found himself in the short end. He sat at the staff table alongside Carl Hathaway.

"I know what we are going to have," he confided. "Peas and chops."

"Go on, now! How do you know?"

"Mr. Webb showed them to me this morning."

"By golly, John's right," Carl Hathaway announced a minute after.

But there were other things too: Fruit salad,

fried potatoes, and, last of all, big heaping dishes of rice pudding.

Other diners came and went. Among them were Jim Tarver, the giant, and Major Mite—a midget hardly taller than the big fellow's hat.

"They sit at the freak table," said Carl Hathaway. "See, the one that stands toward the far end."

"Always in the same place?" John asked.

"Always in the same place. At the beginning of the season, Mr. Webb lays out the seats for everybody in the short end and they never change. That's one of the rules. Another is that smoking is never allowed in the dining tent; and in the short end, no matter how hot the day, every man must wear a coat. The coat rule doesn't carry over to the long end, where there are no ladies and where the working men often come straight from work."

"I never supposed you had tablecloths and everything like that," John said.

"Neither do most folks. Talk to any outsider for a couple of minutes and he's bound to comment upon the 'hard life' we must lead. Always ready to sympathize with the poor old showman who, as a matter of fact eats better, sleeps better, and has more fun than two thirds of those beyond the stake line."

"Then they'll ask, 'Where do you go from

here?' " put in John Brice, the show's detective, who had just sat down opposite them. "Three things folks will always say if you only give them time enough: 'It must be a hard life,' 'Where do you go from here?' and 'Got mostly all gray horses, haven't you?' "

"They will?" exclaimed John.

"Every time—north, east, south, and west, folks always ask the same questions."

"Well, John, and where do you go from here?" asked Carl Hathaway when they had finished their dessert. "Better come along with me. Tough crowd at this table."

"Look out for him, John!" Chief Brice called after them as they started away. "And if you need any help just send for me."

"I will," laughed the boy.

"Been around back?" Carl Hathaway queried, as they entered the menagerie by way of the side wall. "No? Then let's go this way."

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE CIRCUS BACK YARD

LEAVING the menagerie, the two walked through a broad passageway formed by side wall, that led to the big top.

"Always called the connection," Carl Hathaway said, "because it connects the two tents. Notice the culverts?"

John hadn't, but now he saw that, just under the tent eaves, at the points where the connection began and ended, two heavy, slat-like crossings had been laid in the ground and then covered over with shavings.

"There's a drain ditch around the big top and another around the menagerie."

"I saw the men plowing it this morning," John said.

"Well, that ditch runs under these culverts. In case of rain, canvas gutters are swung above the doorways at both ends and between them enough water is taken care of to keep the connection pretty dry. A good thing to remember when you go to camp. Too many folks start to dig their drain ditches after the rain has begun."

As they talked, the two passed into the big top, around the empty hippodrome track, and out through the back door.

"Into the 'back yard,'" Carl Hathaway said. "In Toby Tyler and Polly of the Circus days, the place serving a similar purpose was called the 'pad room.' It was called that because it was there that the cushion-like saddles used by old-time riders were put on the horses. But their shows were little shows. You can see with half an eye why a small space like that wouldn't work here."

And John could. Never before had he seen so many fascinating objects: A crazy-looking cart with a crazier-looking stuffed horse sagging between its shafts; a dummy policeman with red wig and bulging eyes; half-sized automobiles painted a brilliant red and trimmed with glistening brass; blue and white tubs and blue and white pedestals set in nice piles; oddly shaped tables; mysterious looking boxes; barrels adorned with stars, and coaches and palanquins trimmed with tassels and plush and glittering in their dazzling coats of gold paint with the splendor of the sun.

The things were laid, or they stood, or were piled to the left and right of the back door. Straight ahead, a considerable portion of the yard was clear.

A still friendlier tongue shot out against his cheek, all but pushing him over.

"Fine stuff in that punk," Frank Dial said.

"For it is there," Carl Hathaway explained, "that the tournament must form before coming into the big top."

At the back of the yard, a dozen or more wagons had been placed in something of a semicircle. On either side were small, square tents with awning-flies.

"The little ones are the private dressing tents," said John's guide. "That large one to the left is the big dressing tent. The one off there to the right is where the ring-stock is stabled."

"The little horse tent, isn't it?" John asked.

"Exactly. It is there that all the performing horses and those ridden by the equestrians are kept, and there that they are saddled and trapped."

In the shade of the big dressing tent men and women sat in canvas lounging chairs—reading, talking, sewing. A dwarf and a full-grown man were playing a game of checkers. Four others were pitching quoits. Grooms leading frisky ponies crossed the yard to the little horse tent. A serious-looking man was painting the face of a dummy fully three times as broad as his own.

As John watched, he heard Carl Hathaway call, "Oh, Fred!"

Looking, he saw a man dressed in patent leather boots, white riding breeches, and wearing a black

coat. In one hand, he carried a high silk hat. He was dark skinned, which, perhaps, caused his teeth to seem all the whiter as he came toward them.

"Got a First-of-May for you. This is Mr. Bradna, John. My friend John Foster, Fred."

"Please to meet you," acknowledged the other, shaking hands. "What is it—you are maybe a clown, yes? No. Of course not. Well, we will not let Mr. Hathaway make a joke of us."

"Oh, John wouldn't mind. We're old cronies. Seriously, he is with it for the day, getting a story. I thought maybe you would tell him what he wants to know back here."

"With the greatest of pleasure, Carl."

"What did he mean by a First-of-May?" John asked as Carl Hathaway left them.

"Oh, that? That's what we call a newcomer. You see, the show usually goes on the road about May 1st. Sometimes they are called Johnny-come-latelys, especially if they are clowns just starting in the business. Want to see a fine dog?" Fred Bradna suddenly asked. "Come. I'll show you the finest you ever saw."

They were now approaching the rear of a big, boxed-in red wagon that stood at the edge of the yard. An awning shaded its open end and you could climb inside by wooden steps. The forward half of the interior was curtained off, and in front

of the curtain a woman sat at a small table, writing.

On the floor sprawled a furry white mass covered over with green mosquito netting. A huge paw had slipped from under it and hung over the wagon's end.

"Here, Zero!" called Fred Bradna. A massive head was lifted from the floor. The lady looked up from her letter.

"John, here, wants to see Zero."

"Why, of course," answered Mrs. Bradna. "Come, baby! come, here is a nice visitor to call on you." And she pulled the netting to one side while the dog lazied to his feet.

"The flies are so bad, we have to keep him covered, else he can't rest," she explained.

"Well, what do you say?" demanded Fred Bradna. "Isn't he a marvel?—Come on down, Zero.—You need not be afraid. He is friendly with everybody. You could go right past him into the wagon and he would not care."

"Unless you tried to bring even so small a thing out with you," warned Mrs. Bradna. "Then he would stand right up and never let you pass. Come, give the young gentleman your paw, sir. See! Now put your paws on his shoulders. Up! To the shoulders, I say!"

"Brace yourself," called Fred Bradna. And it was well that John did, for as the broad, friendly

feet flopped to his shoulders a still friendlier pink tongue shot out against his cheek, all but pushing him over.

But once Zero was again on all fours, John had his arm around the big, silky neck.

"No, sir, he will not harm any human being who treats him right," Mrs. Bradna went on. "He loves people. But, oh, how that fellow hates other dogs. Just won't have anything to do with them. Only excepting little Nellie Kelly. Nellie! Where are you, Nellie Kelly? Come here and show us how you bite Zero's nose."

From a cushion under the table, a tiny white ball undid itself, stretched, yawned, and then dashed down the steps.

"That's it. Go bite Zero's nose!"

Up bounced Nellie Kelly to take a nip at the black muzzle.

"Sometimes she bites real hard, I think. But Zero knows it is only play," said Mrs. Bradna. "He would be lost without her. They are together all day long and sleep together on the train at night. Come, Zero! Bring Nellie Kelly to me."

Pulling away from John's arm Zero picked Nellie up by the scruff of the neck and deposited her in Mrs. Bradna's lap.

"Now I am training him to carry Nellie Kelly by a shawl strap," she said. "It is easy. He has only to understand what you want—and he under-

stands, oh, so quickly! Perhaps you remember? He is the one that pulls the pigeon hotel wagon when I do my act in the circus."

"What kind of a dog is he?" John asked.

"Part Alaskan huskie and part Siberian sheep dog," Fred Bradna answered. "He always squats down to eat or drink. That's the huskie in him. Nellie Kelly? Oh, she is half spitz and half fox terrier. Mixed dogs are always the best to train. Well, we go some place else now."

"Come back again," Mrs. Bradna called to them.

"Thank you, I'd like to," John answered.

As they turned away, John saw that many of the chairs in front of the private dressing tents were now occupied.

Men wearing caps and braided uniforms sat dangling their legs from the tops of boxes and elephant tubs.

"Not much going on yet, though," said Fred Bradna. "It's still early. Who? The men in the braided suits? They are Micky Graves's men —the ones who take the properties in and out of the big top. Oh, yes, some of the performers get ready early. But there is plenty of time after the first bugle. It's the signal for all to dress, that is, everybody who goes in tournament. Then comes the second bugle, sounding 'mount,' which means that all must be in their places here in the back-yard ready to go when I blow the first whistle."

"Now I know!" John suddenly exclaimed. "I've been trying to think. You're the ring master!"

"Well, not exactly, though it's a good enough name. But in the programme I am called the equestrian director, and if you want to get your story right, you'd best call me that, too. A ring master is in charge of but one ring, while the equestrian director is responsible for the entire performance."

"And do you get everybody to join the circus? I mean like clowns and bareback riders?"

"Oh, no, indeed. Mr. Charles and Mr. John do that. And they say where all the different acts are to appear on the programme and watch all the rehearsals and make no end of changes, until everything runs just to suit. After that is done, I see that the programme is carried out at each performance."

"Just the same, I'd rather have your job," John decided. "It must be great to see everything start just as quick as the whistle goes!"

"You would, would you? Well—but here comes Mr. Charlie now. Mr. Charlie, here is a young man who says he would rather have my job than yours."

John looked up to see a pair of very keen eyes set in a very serious face fixed upon him.

"A most precocious lad, I should say," decided

Mr. Charlie, "a most precocious lad. Do you know that I've often thought the very same thing?" Then, seeing that the boy did not know just how to take him, his eyes began to twinkle. John smiled back at him.

"It was on account of the whistle, sir," he said.

"I guessed as much," nodded Mr. Charlie, laying a hand on his shoulder. "And what's more, I wouldn't give a cent for a boy who didn't want to blow it. Well, see you later."

But before he had gone a half-dozen steps he turned back.

"Only remember this," he said. "No matter what business you may follow when you grow up, don't forget that if you've worked hard enough to hire somebody to blow the whistle, you can always blow it yourself—if you want to."

"And he would know just how to do it," Fred Bradna confided, as he and John walked toward the little horse tent. "I remember, last season, we were all joking one day, and Mr. Charlie bet that he could still play French horn. And he sat in the band and did it—yes, sir! Through four whole numbers."

As they came to the little horse tent, John saw scores of harness sets hanging under the eaves, with plates bearing numbers hooked to each set.

"They go on the horses that find their places after they are all mixed up, don't they?" he asked.

"That's correct. And do you know how the horses are trained to do that?"

"No, sir, but I'd give a lot to find out. Father and I were trying to figure it, only we couldn't."

"Come, we will go inside and I will tell you. See those horses along there? The eight blacks, eight sorrels, and eight grays? Well, the one nearest us is No. 1, the next is No. 2 and so on, up to the last one, which is No. 24. From the very first, they have always been kept in that same formation. They're placed that way in the cars, they go from the cars to the lot in just that way, go that way to water and across the back yard and into the big top without ever any change. So, what do you suppose happens when the ring master mixes them up? You can guess it."

"Go back to their places!"

"That's exactly what they do. Just as quick as they can. Otherwise, it would be like your father trying to keep a span of his horses hitched up the wrong way around."

"They're a lot more nervous than regular horses," John commented.

"They are more high-strung. There's Dixie, for example, the pony little Miss Christiansen rides in the menage number. See the baby colt beside her? Oh, Frank!" he called. "Could my friend here see Philly?"

"Sure," answered a cheery voice from down the tent. "I'll bring him out."

"That's Frank Dial, boss of all the ring stock." Fred Bradna said. "You'll say that Philly is as fine a colt as you ever saw. But what I was going to tell you was that Dixie, the mother, can hear that baby of hers whinny such a ways that you wouldn't believe it. Sometimes, going into the big top, she will whirl and start back to the tent here. Hears the colt over the noise of the band and everything? Well, maybe so. Anyway, something tells her she is wanted."

By this time, Philly had been led into the open.

"Put your arm around him and feel how soft his coat is," invited Frank Dial. "Fine stuff in that punk."

"But I thought only mare colts were called fillies," John said as he patted the baby.

The boss burst into a laugh and slapped his thigh.

"You're all right, son," he said. "That's pretty good. But this one's name is spelled different. It begins with a 'P' and is 'Philly' for 'Philadelphia.' You see the colt was born while the show was playing there, and so we named him after the town."

"That's a circus way," Fred Bradna said, as he and John returned to the back yard, "naming ani-

mals for towns. We have a tiger called Boston, and a camel that arrived in St. Louis has always been called Louis. Or you may hear one canvas man call another 'Omaha' or 'Dallas,' maybe, because he joined the show there."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE THRILL OF THE TOURNAMENT

THE first bugle had sounded while John and the equestrian director were still at the little horse tent. With it, things had begun to stir from every quarter. Elephants in charge of men that John had seen in the menagerie tent shuffled into view.

As two of the elephants came to a halt, they were made to kneel. Then, wardrobe men, staggering under the weight of what looked like folded squares of heavy carpet, heaved their loads upon the broad, gray backs.

With a whisk, they opened the loads, and as they spread them outward, the side that had until now been concealed burst upon the boy's eyes with the glitter of unburied treasure. Countless rhinestones shone from a fretwork of dazzling sequins. It was as though all the jewels in Aladdin's cave had been suddenly heaped there—caught in the folds of blood-red plush.

Next, richly adorned howdahs were strapped in place. Sparkling pendants swung between the

pairs of twinkling yellow eyes. Crowns as big as bail rings, set with green and purple stones and topped by snow-white plumes, were fixed at rakish angle on the ponderous heads.

"Know who that is?" someone asked, as a pointing finger pushed past the boy's face. "Old John."

The finger belonged to George Denman.

"Looks a lot different when he's all dolled up in that ostrich-feather crown. In tournament, he's what we call a howdah elephant. So's Fanny, who's just beyond him. Only wear a single saddle, you know. Now Babe and Romey wear a double saddle and march side by side."

Again following the finger, John saw two other elephants draped in velvet trappings. And near them, two of the babies.

"Which are those little ones?" he asked.

"Mabel and Mary. They go in as clowns. The boys will be tying their hats on in a minute. There goes Mary's now."

A tall, cone-like cap was being set in place, and an elastic band carried under the neck to hold it. From ears to tails, the two babies wore flowing robes embroidered with grotesque figures done in silver and blue.

"Come back after the second bugle and I'll let you give Mary the stick," George Denman promised, as he moved away.

"What did he mean?"

But Fred Bradna only answered, "You just wait and see."

And there were too many other things happening for John to try guessing.

Scores upon scores of caparisoned horses were being led into the yard, their brocaded saddle-cloths reflecting the sunlight as they passed. Camels wearing red, yellow, and green plush blankets stood blinking in places where two minutes before there had been only empty ground. Ladies dressed as princesses, or butterflies, stood talking together. Others were finding seats on thrones set high upon wonderfully carved floats.

You had but to turn around and then look back again, and where there had been nothing, there stood a Mother Goose group exactly like a page from a picture book. Or a burnished dragon on wheels, with places to sit on its winding back; and queer, pigtailed dwarfs with red lips and chalked faces grinning down from the seats. Or, again, six Shetland ponies attached to a mere toy of a coach.

Climbing to the top of a property box, John could see that the back door through which he had come into the yard was now closed off by a broad-striped curtain. Inside the big top a band was playing. Now and then, the breeze would riffle the scalloped eaves, and when it did, he could see people's heads above the edge of the side wall.

"There goes the second bugle," Fred Bradna said. "See you after while. But here—here is someone you should know."

A girl dressed in fluffy silks was passing.

"Oh, Miss Rooney! Cinderella! This is John Foster. Won't you please show him your coach?"

"Surely I will," she smiled. "Come right along."

She led the way to the carriage to which the Shetlands were hitched.

"I have more fun than the story-book Cinderella," she said, "for I go to a ball twice each day. Wouldn't you like to step in?"

John got in beside her. As they talked, a warm, strange something brushed past his neck. Pulling away, he turned to see the black muzzle of a camel wearing bright leather trappings.

"That's Louis," laughed Cinderella. "He and Duke always line up just behind my coach. He's forever nosing about. Just naturally curious, I guess, and wants to investigate strangers."

"Is he the one that was born in St. Louis?" John asked.

"I think so."

"Yes'm, he is," volunteered a man in Arabian costume, who stood near. "Been going in tournament for eight seasons now—haven't you old-timer?" He pinched the camel on his soft, flabby nose.

But, by now, the Shetlands, at a cluck from their driver, had taken a step forward.

"We are beginning to move in closer," Cinderella warned, "so perhaps you had best climb out now. You'll find Mr. Denman just ahead."

"I see him," John said. "Thank you for letting me sit by you."

He made his way forward. The elephants, like everything else in the yard, had begun to close in toward the back door. Inside the big top, the band had ceased to play. Men carrying horns and other instruments were coming around the curtain's edge. Now they had slipped off their uniformed coats, donned brilliant red ones, and placed tall shakos on their heads. Near them, standard bearers were unfurling gorgeous flags. Farther back—between the flags and John—was a sea of waving plumes, glistening helmets, and peacock-colored fans.

"There you are!" George Denman called, as John edged his way through a knot of satin-coated pages. "Just in time to give Mary the stick. Here, Texas!"

From a pocket Texas took a piece of broom handle about eight inches long, and handed it to John.

"Pick it up, Mary!" the boss commanded. "Let her take it. That's the boy! Now I suppose you'd like to know what it's all about."

"Yes, sir, I would."

"To keep her out of mischief when she gets inside. You see, when elephants march one ahead of the other, they hold trunk to tail. But here there's no tail for Mary to hold. She walks on the outside, around the hippodrome track—next to where the people sit. And that trunk of hers is always weaving. Why, one day, she reached over and took a whole package of crackerjack from a boy."

"Came out with a palm-leaf fan, one matinée," put in Texas.

"So now we give her this stick to carry," the boss explained. "She means all right, only she's just a punk. Punk elephant's just like a punk dog—always up to something. But you give a pup a stick to carry and what does he do? Prances along, head up, proud as Punch. Thinks he's important. Same way with Mary, here. Same way with folks. Give them something to do, and they'll keep out of mischief. Get me?"

John nodded. He was patting the baby clown.

"Scratch her ears. No, more in back of them—this way. She'd stand and let you do that all day."

But just then there were other things for Mary to do. A shrill whistle announced this fact—a whistle which John knew was sounded by Fred Bradna from inside the big top.

Instantly the striped curtain was flung back.

"We are beginning to move in closer," Cinderella warned.

"She'd stand and let you do that all day."

Then a fanfare of trumpets. The bass drum sent three booming notes across the back yard. The snares rolled. Cornets screamed piercingly. Clarinets yelped. There came a wave of music as brilliant as the sun darts that blazed and rebounded from the epaulets on the bandmen's coats.

The tournament was moving! The show had begun.

"Better stand over at the side there," called George Denman.

John found a cleared space near one of the private dressing tents. Here everything passed him. But not with a rush, as you might suppose. Not even hurriedly. All moved quite deliberately, some talking or calling out to one another as they went. Until they reached the back door: there they came to strict attention and fell in immediately behind that part of the pageant which had just passed inside.

But if the tournament had been eye-dazzling as it stood awaiting the whistle, it was now a thousand times more so. For, as it moved, there was not a jewel, not a shield, not a spangled banner but caught its own particular sunbeam, held it for a moment, and then sent it skyrocketing upward, diffused in innumerable splinters of blinding yellow light.

And slowly the whole radiant mass eddied toward the back door, there to be lost to view as

autumn leaves move across a pond to be drawn into the mouth of a flume.

Knights mounted on prancing chargers, sovereigns holding scepters and surrounded by their courts, princesses that smiled down from their seats, or swarthy slaves from the South Seas swaying in the double saddle carried by Babe and Romey. Color everywhere. The most brilliant of reds and shimmering blues mingling with quick flitting flashes of light as the sun struck upon armor or mirrored its shafts against a polished hub or the gem-set crown of some nursery-rhyme king.

Cinderella waved from her coach as she passed. Came guards on foot, clowns with jingling bells and huge jumping jacks; yet other floats and tasseled palanquins. And last of all, Fanny and Old John with their ostrich plumed crowns.

No, not last of all either. For, just as they entered the doorway, a clown trotted past John. And under his arm was an elephant no larger than a six-weeks-old pig!

Seeing the boy, he set the baby on the ground and, pointing to Fanny, called, "That's his mammy!"

Then, big elephants, the clown, with the baby paddling after, passed into the big top. John craned his neck. Baby bull—pshaw! Of course it couldn't be. And yet——

But there was no time to speculate. Already the

van of the tournament had circled the hippodrome track. Reaching the screen of the bandstand, a part of the musicians doffed shakos and scarlet coats, while others kept on with the blare of the march.

Now the pageant began to pour out of the big top. But what a change in its manner! Those who were kings or queens had kept their hauteur; or they that were jesters, their grimace; and they that rode as noble knights and ladies fair had held their poise until, group by group, they passed through the door. Then——!

Down from horse, throne, or tableau they came: some leaping nimbly where the distance was slight, others vaulting in a bound from saddle to earth, still others descending by ladders that waiting men thrust in place.

But not an instant of pause once their feet touched the ground. The very stride of the leap became the first step in a run that took them flying across the width of the yard—removing plumes, caps, hats, cloaks, belts, or crowns as they ran.

Here, fast scurrying courtiers unbuckling swords as they went; there, those that were butterflies unfastening their wings; or fleet-footed standard bearers tossing banners to wardrobe men as they moved swiftly past.

Pell-mell—mounts, princesses, warriors, foot soldiers, chariots, and palanquins—all parting

company, one from the other, as they came through the door. It was as though some retinue of old had been put to sudden rout; perhaps driven past a breach in a wall and then scattered in flight across the face of a plain.

Yet it was not a rout. Only orderly confusion. Not a voice raised. A darting out, a darting around, a skirting of some gilded float yet to be cleared of the yard, or a swift pass between horses as alert grooms took charge of the now riderless mounts.

Everything kept moving away from the door and out of the yard: horses to the little horse tent; floats, throne cars, and chariots to the outer edge; men and women to the big dressing tent, there to make ready for the acts that were to come.

A jangling of harness, and the six Shetlands trotted out. But before they had come abreast of where John stood, Cinderella had stood up, and, as though suddenly hearing the warning stroke of the fabled clock, gathered her skirts, and leaped to the ground from the still moving coach! A flash of silks, and she too had disappeared through the dressing-tent door.

Now men in chained mail, then flag bearers, and finally, tagging behind Fanny and Old John, the clown and the baby that formed the end of the pageant.

"It surely is a clever get-up," said a voice at

John's elbow. He looked to see a lady standing quite close to him. Like him, she was watching the toy elephant.

"But it isn't—of course, it isn't a sure-enough elephant," he protested.

"Suppose we find out. Danny!" she called. "Danny McPride! Can you spare a minute, please?"

"Certainly, Miss Leitzel," answered the clown. "Want Teddy too?"

"That's just who we want. We want to know if he's a sure-enough elephant."

"Absolutely the only one in the world that barks instead of trumpeting," the other said, very solemnly.

But now John saw what it was. Two pairs of feet protruded from the gray "trousers" that encased the dog's legs.

"French poodle," said Danny McPride. "Sit up, Teddy," he commanded, as he placed the dog on a near-by elephant tub. "Here, you take his front feet. Now tell him to speak."

"Gr-r-r-ruh!" barked Teddy from behind his strange mask.

"Now we'll remove the make-up. There's a buckle just over his shoulders."

"I've got it," John answered. The next minute, the dog, freed from his trappings, was rolling about on the ground.

"Does he do any tricks?"

"All kinds. But his best is the breakaway-ladder perch. He climbs a ladder to a platform that's set on a pole that I hold. Then I pull the ladder away, hand the perch to another clown, and he jumps into my arms."

"Oh, I remember," John said. "I've seen him do it lots of times."

"Not Teddy," the clown corrected. "I've had him only two years. You're thinking of Taylor the Great. He was with me for twelve years. Greatest dog I ever owned. Just like a person. There were days when you could see he wasn't feeling at his best. But he never shirked; was always ready to go on with the act. Little shaver, too. Only weighed seven pounds. Teddy weighs fourteen."

"Have you got Taylor yet?"

"He's dead," Danny answered. "Died three springs ago when we were playing at the old Garden. He hadn't been very well—he was past fourteen—and I'd given him some medicine and he had gone to sleep. I went out for a walk. Now, he always slept at the foot of my bed, and whenever I came back to my room, or the cars, or wherever we happened to be, I always used to speak to him, as soon as I opened the door. 'Taylor!' I'd call, and he would raise his head, and I would say, 'All right.' But this time he didn't

move. The second he didn't, I knew he was gone.

"Lad," Danny went on after a moment's pause, "you may think I'm crazy, but I lay down on the bed and cried just like a girl. He was such a good old scout, was that Taylor dog. Always willing to work—sick or well. Just regular show folks, he was.

"Well, when the show left New York to go out under canvas, I went with it. But I had no dog. I'd looked at several, but there didn't seem to be any that I wanted to own. Then, one day, when we were playing Harrisburg, a gentleman came out and asked to see me. He had a dog, but was going on a long journey and wanted to find a home for him. He said he'd often seen Taylor work, and had sort of got to feel that he knew me—'from the seats,' as we say. Then I told him about Taylor and how I hadn't been able to find another dog. That night, he brought Teddy back here to the dressing tent. We fell for each other at first sight. Didn't we, old partner? And here he is.

"Now I've got to go change," Danny McPride ended. "Come on, Teddy." With the dog biting at his heels, he trotted away toward the big dressing tent.

CHAPTER XIX

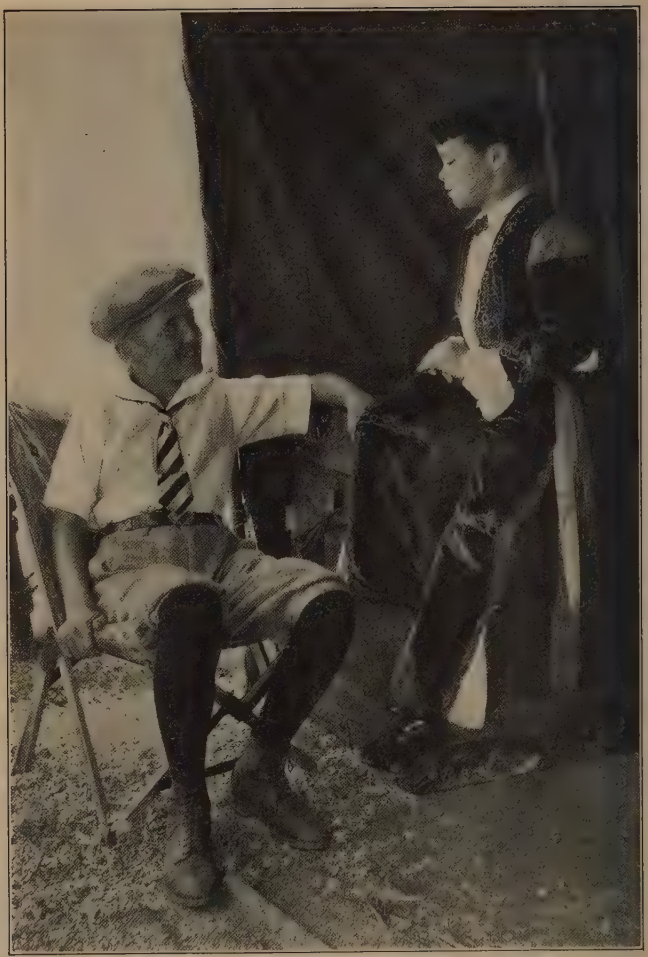
A BOY OF THE WHITE TOPS

JOHN watched Danny and Teddy until they had disappeared. Then he turned back toward the tent where he had stood while watching the tournament. He noticed that the name "Leitzel" was stamped in black letters on the wall that was nearest him. He remembered that Danny McPride had called her "Miss Leitzel." Then it was she he had seen pictured on the billboards, whirling about by one hand at the end of a rope. Only there, of course, she had been shown in costume. But she was nowhere in sight now. A curtain had been drawn across the front of her tent.

In the yard, near the back door, men were stretching a square patch of canvas over the ground. He wondered what it was for.

Inside the big top, he could see the galloping horses that formed the "Fête of the Garlands," their riders holding be-ribboned wands arched high over their heads. His ears caught the signaling "whirrs" of Fred Bradna's whistle. Again it sounded, and the next moment riders and horses

"Gr-r-r-ruh!" barked Teddy from behind the strange mask.



"What do you do with the circus?" John asked.

were pouring into the yard. Now he saw why the canvas was spread. For as the stream sped past, each of the riders tossed his wand to the center of it. So sure was their aim that scarcely a one rolled into the dirt.

Leaping from their mounts even before they had come to a halt, the masters and mistresses of the Fête hurried toward the big dressing tent, just as those of the pageant had done. Grooms caught the horses and led them away. Wardrobe men rolled the wands in the canvas and whisked them off to a nearby wagon. The yard was clear again.

At least, it was cleared of everything that had been a part of the "Fête of the Garlands." John soon discovered that it was never entirely empty. For no sooner did this or that go, than that or this came to take its place.

Yet he was now witnessing the greatest lull that comes to the yard between the time when the first bugle sounds and the races are run. That is when the performing elephants go into the rings. For, with the exception of those that march in the tournament, the elephants always enter the big top through the connection. So do the seals. All other acts enter and leave by way of the yard.

The elephants were on now. Next would come the "little aërial number," along with the "twistable ones," as Levi of the big top canvas called the contortionists.

Already they were coming from the dressing tent to limber up. Here a man placed the palm of one hand on the top of a stake within a top spin of where John stood watching. Time after time he raised his spangled body straight in the air. Another vaulted to the edge of a table and there thrust his head in and out through his legs. A third sat on a tub, first bending the sole of one foot and then the other between his hands.

It was while John was watching the man on the tent stake that he heard a shout.

"Hi, there!"

He looked around. Under the fly of one of the little dressing tents across the way, he saw a boy sitting on a trunk.

"You!" he motioned to John. "Visiting?"

John nodded.

"Then why don't you come on over?"

"My name's Paul Nelson," he said, as John came up.

"Mine's John Foster."

"Not going to join out or anything, are you?"

"Oh, no. I'm just getting a story."

"Well, have a seat, then."

"What do you do with the circus?" John asked, when he had sat down.

"Oh, I'm riding menage this season," the other answered, yawning. "And then, I've always been in the family act."

"Listen to him!" laughed a young girl who had come out of the tent. "You'd think that he was at least fifty."

"Well, anyhow, I started younger than you did, Missy Rosina!"

"That's right, Paul. Stick up for yourself," someone else said, and, coming from behind the curtain at the rear, a woman seated herself near John.

"This is my mother," Paul said. "Tell him how old I was when I went on the first time, Mumsey."

"Exactly nine months and two days," replied Mrs. Nelson. "But that was only in fun. We were playing in Melbourne, Australia, and one afternoon his sisters dressed him in a clown suit and Father carried him in on one shoulder."

"There!" asserted Paul, triumphantly. "I guess that's a record!"

As they talked, other girls came from the curtained-off part of the tent—Oneida, Hilda, Theol, Estrella, and Carmencita—each dressed for the family act.

"Only six poor little sisters to handle this one wild Indian of a brother," teased Hilda.

"I can put you on your back!" boasted Paul.

"Here, here! Less noise!" came a quiet voice, as a man dipped his head to come under the fly.

"Ah! Father, himself!" put in Theol. "Here we all are together—the family album!"

"Guess we'd better do our group posing for the audience," remarked the other. "What do you say? Let's go."

They started toward the back door.

"Tell your friend about Billie," called Mrs. Nelson.

"That's my goat," Paul explained. "Gee, I wish I had him along. You ought to see him pull. Before the snow comes, I use him on a wagon, though he's just about as good on a sled."

"Is he home?"

"Yep. At Mt. Clemens. That's where we always winter. Dad owns a couple of hotels there. A pretty good town. They got a swell high-school basket-ball team. Theol and Estrella have both been captains. Estrella sure can play. She's the most popular girl there. Anyhow, I guess she is. She got elected in a contest. Have you seen Boots and Gerry yet?" Paul asked suddenly. "They belong to Miss Leitzel. Let's go over."

CHAPTER XX

BOOTS, GERRY, AND NELLIE

PAUL NELSON led the way back to the tent John had left.

"Miss Leitzel," he called.

"What is it, Paul?"

"Where are Boots and Gerry?"

"Right here." And pushing aside the curtain that enclosed the interior of her tent, Miss Leitzel stepped out, two Boston terriers tumbling after. Now, dressed in blue and silver, she looked quite as she had on the circus bills, except that she was lots prettier.

The dogs bounded forward to greet Paul.

"We've got ninety-eight with the show, and these are the only ones that aren't trained. Isn't that right, Miss Leitzel?"

"Entirely. I keep them just for company," she told John, "and thought it would be fun not to teach them a single trick. They don't even sit up in a corner."

"Which is Boots?"

"The one with the white face. His real name

is Squire Boots, and Gerry isn't Gerry at all, but Lady Geraldine, instead."

"Tell him about the time Boots got lost," said Paul.

"You mean when we were coming into Peoria? That was really funny. You see, on the train, both dogs sleep in my stateroom. They have their cushions and never move from them all night long. But when daylight comes, I let them into the vestibule. That was what I did one morning as we were nearing Peoria. Well, when I got ready to leave the car, Boots was missing. I appealed to the station master, notified the police, and two of our boys scoured the town. But no Boots. Between shows, I went back to the cars. Our porter had a theory. He recalled that the train had come to a short stop about a mile down the yards, near some coal bins. Perhaps Boots, supposing we were in, had hopped off. Perhaps——

"I knew what he was thinking. Poor little Boots!

"'Come on,' I said. 'At least we'll have the satisfaction of knowing.'

"It seemed to me that we walked five miles instead of one; going in and around strings of freight cars, but always returning to the track over which we had pulled into town.

"All at once I heard a yelp. Something came leaping toward us. I say 'something,' because,

well as I know him, I hardly recognized the little dickens. That white face of his was as black as your shoes. He was one mass of coal dust and grime. Just then, a man came from across the tracks.

" 'Is that your dog, lady?' he asked.

" 'He most certainly is,' I answered.

" 'Well, of all the ornery, stubborn, contrary purps I ever did see, he's it.'

"Then he told us that he was the watchman in that end of the yards. He had first seen Boots about nine o'clock that morning, stretched out, head on paws, near the coal bins. He had tried to make friends with him, but each time he approached, Boots would back off, growling.

" 'Then, when I'd go away, he'd come smack back to the spot he'd left and lay down again. Finally I got mad and tried chasing him. I lammed two or three hunks of coal against the bin. But all he'd do was to hug tighter to the ground. After while I decided he was game, even if he was crazy, and so I let him stick.'

"Of course, there has never been any doubt in my mind as to what Boots was thinking," Miss Leitzel concluded. "He was saying to himself, 'This is where that show train left me and this is where I'm going to stay until it comes back.' "

"Roy Rush, who's boss over at the dog wagons, claims all brindles have nutty ways of figuring

things out," Paul put in. "He says that's the way Nellie's noodle used to work."

"You mean Red Wagon Nellie," nodded Miss Leitzel. "Mr. Hutchinson, who's our treasurer, and Mr. DeWolfe, the show's auditor, together owned a Boston bull that for years made her home in the circus office wagon. Her name was Nellie, and if ever there was a spoiled dog, she was the one. 'Most everybody around the front would bring her bones when they came from the cook house. Of course, she couldn't eat half of them, and so would bury the extra ones under the wagon. As, for example, she would bury them there to-day. Then the show would move on to the next stand. The following morning Nellie would jump out of the wagon and straightway start digging for the bones she had hidden the day before! I give you my word, she would sometimes dig in four or five places. Then you would see her sitting back, eyeing first one hole and then the other as much as to say, 'Well, have I gone looney, or what? I just know I put those bones there yesterday!'"

"That's a good one!" John exclaimed. "Where is she now?"

"An auto ran over her in St. Louis. Killed her like a wink."

While John was listening, growls, sniffs, and what at times sounded like the muffled roar of a

lion had from time to time come from somewhere back of Miss Leitzel's tent.

"Just the bears," Paul had said.

"You haven't been over to the bear wagons?" Miss Leitzel inquired. "But you must not miss seeing Tona and Ella. This is their last season on the road, you know."

John following, she went to the awning's edge. A man and a woman sat reading in the lee of a big red wagon farther back in the yard.

"Hello!" she called to them. "Busy?"

"Not very. Why?"

"John here wants to meet Tona and Ella. Go ahead. You'll like Mr. and Mrs. Pallenberg."

CHAPTER XXI

AT THE BEAR WAGONS

JOHN did like them. Mrs. Pallenberg had such friendly, smiling eyes, and her husband such steady blue ones.

"Come, we go around to the other end of the wagon," Emil Pallenberg said, after they had become acquainted. "Know anything about bears?"

"Not much, sir."

"Well, nobody does until he gets a long time introduced. Bears, more than any other animals, are like people. Everyone is unlike from the other one. You wouldn't believe it, perhaps, but I tell you, the very way you walk toward a bear —fast or slow—makes a difference. We must be very careful when we are working the act, always to make the same movements. If we do things a new way, even ever so little, the bear will get nervous. Then he won't work right."

They had come to separate compartments at the far end of the wagon den. At their approach, two large bears, one in each partioned off place, began to sniff and weave from side to side.

"There they are," said Emil Pallenberg. "Tona and Ella, now making their farewell tour. Last year was really their last, because they haven't worked since then. In fact, we were going to leave them home this summer, only we didn't get their houses done."

"Where is that?" John asked.

"In Clinton, Connecticut. We have our own home there and also a bear barn. Now we are building a much larger barn. It will have a high basement. In the basement, with windows looking out, we have planned two big rooms—one for Ella and one for Tona."

"There they will stay as long as they live," said Mrs. Pallenberg, "having always a good home. And do you know why? Because those two bears made us our name and our fortune. Everything we have, we owe to them. Am I not right, Papa?"

"Quite right. They were the first bears we ever owned. Now Ella is eighteen and Tona seventeen. It is time they should have a good rest. We were in Cologne when we bought Tona. She was so very small that they sent her to us from Hamburg in a kind of bird cage."

"Did you begin training her right off?" John asked.

"No, not until she was about eighteen months old. It is never wise to start too soon. The brain must develop. Also the strength."

"There never was a bear so smart as Ella, though," declared Mrs. Pallenberg. "Don't you say so, Papa?"

"Absolutely the smartest bear that ever lived. And she was the first bear in the world that ever rode a bicycle. Mind you, the first in the world. I know that to be a fact. We trained her on the —what you call it?—the promenade, in the zoo at Cologne. We used to get up very early, long before the people came. For a year we kept it a secret."

"Ella is so sure," added Mrs. Pallenberg. "Suppose we have what we call an opening. Like at the beginning of the season in New York. Perhaps the bears have not worked before an audience for weeks and weeks and Ella not even practised. For that is another funny thing: She absolutely refuses to practise. She stopped after about—when was it she stopped, Papa?"

"Well, I guess it was about when she was three years working."

"And never would practise again after that. You couldn't drive her to practise! And yet she never in her life spoiled an opening for us—I mean, never fell off her bicycle, or kept looking around at something strange, like a new clown, instead of doing her act. No, sir, not once, even."

"She's too smart to practise," laughed Emil Pallenberg. "Nobody can tell me that that Ella

"His real name is Squire Boots," Miss Leitzel said.

"There they are," said Emil Pallenberg, "Tona and Ella, now making their farewell tour."

bear doesn't think. Why, once, when I was training her at Cologne, I took her to a part of the zoo where the pavement went uphill a little and then sloped down on the other side. I wanted to see if she would pedal up grade. She did it all right, but what do you suppose happened when the bicycle started down the other way? She put her feet on the steps and coasted! And mind you, that was the very first time she had ever ridden downhill!"

"Oh, yes, and Papa, tell him about the time she rode into the town!"

The trainer chuckled.

"That was years ago," he said. "We were playing with a small circus in France. There weren't very many acts, and so there was time to work the bears longer. Ella would ride her bicycle on the stage, then go down a runway and pedal out the door all by herself.

"Well, one day, the bear boy, who was always waiting outside to catch her and take her to her wagon, wasn't there. And do you know that Ella kept right on going! So help me! There was an open space between some wagons, so she steered for it. The show was just at the edge of town and she rode right down the main street. Of course, those who saw her go ran for me, and as soon as I could, I got on a horse and went after her. But you should have seen the people scatter!

And the gendarmes, too! None of them had lost a bear."

"Diana will grow up to be a second Ella," predicted Mrs. Pallenberg, nodding toward a smaller bear at the far end of the wagon.

"Maybe so, Mamma, but I'm afraid we will never have another just like Ella." And as if she understood, Ella sniffed and rattled the bars with her big, black muzzle.

They walked to where the others were quartered.

"Besides Diana, there are Martha, Lily, Dolly, Mischa, Rajah, Rosie, and Laura," Emil Pallenberg told John, as he pointed them out. "They are the bears that go in performance now. But not all at one time. You see, we have extra bears, and they alternate in the act, one performance in and one out—especially on very warm days, when the work is hard."

"What kind of bears are they?" John asked.

"Like Tona and Ella—Asiatic Syrians and Russian brown bears. The silver flecked ones are the Syrians. They are the best for training. The American bear is not good. Someway, he has not got what you call stuff. Of course, not all Syrians and Russians make good performers. There was Mischa's mother. As nice a bear as ever was—oh, an awful nice bear. Remember, Mamma? She would be in a room when somebody would

knock, and she would always go and open the door. But learn to skate or walk tight rope? Never in thousand years. Had she been a person, she would have made a fine servant, but not more than that, I think."

"But Mischa the Second has a good brain," declared Mrs. Pallenberg, "and, oh, how that bear loves watermelon! All are crazy over watermelon, but Mischa most of all. Next to that, they like carrots best."

"What else do they eat?" asked John.

"Bread, milk, eggs, apples, and now and then some cabbage," said Emil Pallenberg. "Only the bread must not be too fresh or it gets doughy and sticks to their teeth. And bears, like people, should always have clean teeth. You think you will remember all that?" he wanted to know as the three left the wagon.

"I'll try," John answered. "Thank you for telling me so much."

"That's all right," smiled Mrs. Pallenberg. "You see we have a boy, too. Haven't we, Papa? Only he is home. Not for weeks and weeks will we see him again. It is a long time."

CHAPTER XXII

THE GOOSE PROFESSOR

IT WAS while he was crossing the edge of the yard that John got acquainted with Jack Lyons, the "goose prof."

The introduction began with a queer, hissing sound and a nip at his leg which caused him to hop to the top of a near-by property box. As he made the leap, he looked back to see a big goose dressed in a plaid jacket and wearing a bonnet of similar pattern that was tied in a bow under its outstretched neck.

At almost the same instant, a man's arm scooped the enemy from off the ground. He, too, was dressed in Scotch costume. Besides, he wore a scraggly red wig, and his face was painted white and red like a clown's.

"Cut it, Tommy!" he scolded. "Is that any way to treat a visitor?"

But Tommy merely hissed again and gave no signs of repenting.

"Bill, there, is all right. Never offers to bother anybody," the man said, pointing to Tommy's twin

in dress and size. Indeed, the one named Bill was already waddling off, well in advance of them.

"Come along and I'll show you their coops."

John joined the queer procession as Bill, now far in the lead, took them toward the dog wagons. Near them, they came to three kennel-like boxes made of canvas, with flaps for doors and straw for bedding.

"This is where they kip through the day," Jack Lyons said, "and here that I give them a swim and a cooling off."

Near by was a tub partly filled with water. More was added, until it brimmed over at the top. Impatiently, Bill and Tommy pushed in and around Jack Lyons's legs until he had stooped to remove their jackets and hats. That done, he set them afloat in the tub. Then, John helping, he scooped handfuls of water and let it trickle over their heads, down their necks, and off the ends of their yellow bills.

"Of course, that's all the bunk about me being a professor," Jack Lyons told John, as they squatted by the tub. "The boys have just hung that on me because I run a geese college out in Illinois. Anyhow, I guess it's that, seeing that I've been raising and training the old honkers there for going on twenty years."

"Just for the circus?"

"It and vaudeville. Naturally, some of them

make better actors than others, but don't let anybody ever tell you a goose hasn't got a lot of sense. Those that make fun of them by taking their name in vain calling stupid folks geese don't know what they're talking about.

"Jimmy—he's the one off there at the last coop —why, Jimmy can play soldier, march just like one, and he'll take after anything or anybody I tell him to. He's the flying, running rascal that chases the clown down the hippodrome track later on in the show.

"Tommy, here, is still young, but he's got great stuff in him. Knows how to use his head. This season his stunt is to follow Bill and me around the hippodrome, me playing on a clarinet. Now, some days, when business is big, people are seated on straw or pieces of side wall along the edge of the track. That clutters up our line of march, and one day, some boys who were sitting there headed Tommy off. But that didn't stop him. He just backed up a bit, flew clean over their heads, and joined in behind Bill, just as though nothing had happened.

"He's a bit nippy, is Tommy, but that's a good sign. Shows spirit and brains. Same as a canary that will peck your finger. Lots of folks think that kind of a canary is gentle. Fact is, he's wild —full of pep, and so isn't afraid to tackle you."

"How do they travel at night?" John asked.

"In the razorbacks' band wagon."

"Razorbacks' band wagon!" the boy repeated. "Which one is that?"

"The dog wagon, then. It's often called by the other name because the dogs are always sure to start yelping when the wagon goes up the runs, and so give the trainmen a little music. Bill, here, always adds a few honks—sort of plays bull fiddle. Don't you, old snooter?"

He lifted the geese from the water, set them down near one of the coops, and fastened cords attached to stakes to their legs.

"Now, I'm going to remove the scenery," he added, with a wave that indicated his own costume. "Coming over toward the dressing tent?"

They left Tommy and Bill stretching their wings to the warm sunshine. But John saw that they watched Prof. Lyons as long as he was in sight. It didn't seem such a hard life, after all. Certainly not for a clown goose.

"They have it pretty easy, don't they," he commented, looking back.

"Easy is the word. Perform twice a day, get a bath regular, every morning and every afternoon, sleep well and eat well. You won't believe it, maybe, but one day a committee representing something or other started to get after me for cruelty to geese. Can you beat it! I had a notion to sic Jimmy after the whole three of them."

"He'd have chased them, I'll bet!" John laughed.

"He'll run anything out of gas that I set him on," agreed Jack Lyons. "Mind you, I'm not saying that such committees aren't O. K. Like as not there are trainers who are cruel to animals just as there are parents that whale their children. But such trainers ought to be ridden out for the game's sake, as well as the animals'. And, anyhow, they're just pure nuts. For don't you ever believe that an animal that is cowed when he's trained isn't going to show it when he's in public. And if he's got his spirit broke and doesn't look nice and pretty and tail-waggy when he's performing, what good is he as an actor? On the other hand, if he's trained correct, he's better for it. I tell you, those geese back there hold their heads a full inch higher than geese that's never been educated. They're proud of their learning."

"Look out for him: he'll be selling you some stock in his goose farm if you aren't careful," warned a voice, as they reached the big dressing-tent door. John looked up to see the barrel-like stomach of the clown policeman all but barring their way in.

"Of course that's all bunk about me being a professor," Jack Lyons told John.

"Last of all the trimmings are added—red, blue, black or all of them, depending upon what sort of a face you are after."

CHAPTER XXIII

INTO CLOWN ALLEY

"MY NAME'S Spriggs," the blockader announced, holding out his hand to John. "Jim Spriggs of Toledo, Ohio. Know where Toledo is, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Couldn't help it. Capital of the world, that town. Live there in the winter time, and have my cookie cutters made there too."

In deep solemnity, he pointed to the six-inch wide star that adorned his blue coat.

"Against the law to pack a cookie cutter without a license in a lot of states. But old Jim's never been arrested yet, by crackey! Truth is, I've got all these town coppers plumb skeered. Know what I'd do if they tried to take me? Well, first place I'd run. Then, if they caught up, I'd roll on 'em."

His voice changed to an everyday tone.

"Saw you talking to Mr. Bradna, and so thought I'd introduce myself," he explained. "Always glad to have a visitor around. Been in the big dressing tent yet?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Well, well, that will never do. I don't have to go on for a couple of minutes yet. Come, I'll show you around."

The door to the dressing tent opened into a partitioned-off passage. This was perhaps a dozen feet wide and extended across the entire width of the tent. On both sides were tables strewn with costumes, and behind the tables, John saw rows of trunks and large wicker baskets.

"You were in the yard when the tournament came out, weren't you?" Jim Spriggs asked. "Well, here's where the costumes are kept. All us men dress on the other side of this right-hand partition, and the ladies beyond that one on your left. We leave hats, coats, and such-like, as we go past on the run. Then, after we've changed to our next dress, we bring out the rest of the stuff and put it here on these tables, following which, Mrs. Anderson and her assistants pack it away in those trunks."

"You mean we do after we've looked things over for rips and missing spangles," corrected a woman who was busy sewing a few steps away.

"Well, of course, of course, Mrs. Anderson. All except mine. Now, I've been in the business for thirty-seven years, and never lost a single spangle. No, sir——"

"Will you listen to him rave!" exclaimed Mrs.

Anderson. "Here!" she said, turning back the collar of a coat she was mending that John might look. "The boaster fairly caught. Do you see that name there?"

On a small square label was lettered, "J. Spriggs, King's Jester."

"His!" accused the wardrobe mistress. "With a satin tab half torn in two!"

"Crackey! That must have been when it caught on that stake when I was coming out. Now, I——"

But laughter drowned the explanation.

"What! Make theatre of the law! I'll run yez all in!" the clown shouted. "Or, at any rate, I would if I hadn't promised to take my friend here back to the Alley. Come on, John, before I hurt somebody."

Followed by a fresh burst of laughter, they retreated to a flap at one end of the partition. Jim Spriggs pushed it aside, and they stepped into the men's dressing room.

At first glance, John saw what looked like all the coat and hat racks in the world—dozens and dozens of them, set close together and forming long rows. But they were racks of a peculiar sort. Each had a single standard of small iron pipe. The pipe was held upright by the simple process of having had its lower end driven into the ground. The top of each pipe was fitted with

a square of wood the size of a checker board. In the edges were many hooks, and from the hooks hung coats, hats, caps, shirts, tights, costumes—scads of things.

Between every two rows of racks ran alleyways. Trunks, set end to end, flanked both sides of the alleys. And on the trunks, in chairs, or standing with their faces close to little mirrors that swung from the racks, were men—the very men that John had so often seen in the distance, riding fast-moving horses, juggling one another aloft, or skimming like birds across the dome of the big top.

He was now in the innermost part of all Spangleland.

Some who were already dressed sat reading or talking. Others were singing. A half dozen had gathered close to a radio, its aërial fixed to one of the clothes stands. One picked a mandolin.

The whole place buzzed like a hive. Above this steady hum there now and then rose the voice of somebody in one alley calling across to some friend in another.

A snatch of a song would start and then end abruptly.

"Sweet Rosie O'Grady, she's——. Who said there wasn't going to be a mulligan next Sunday? —She's my little rose——"

"Hey, there, Shubee! Why don't you hire a hall?"

"Scalp me, will you? But, my bandy-legged dandy, how can you? I have no hair!"

The slap had been sounded by Fred Stelling's own hands!

"For the same reason that you've never played the Palace!"

"Wow! Guess that will hold you for a while!"

"Who's that whistling? Want to crab my act?"

Cries of "Put him out! Throw him out! Must have been vaccinated with a phonograph needle!"

On a trunk top a man in tights trimmed with silver, and another dressed in yellow satin, were playing chess, wholly oblivious of the babble.

One in evening clothes slept peacefully in a low canvas chair. Performers, fresh and in spotless tights, threaded their way out of this alley or that and hurried out through the flap on their way to the big top. Others, with beads of sweat glistening from their foreheads, passed them on their return from it.

The chess player in the yellow satin looked up from the game and put his head to one side as if listening.

"All right," he nodded. "I can play ten minutes longer."

"Tom was listening to the band," Jim Spriggs told John. "That's the way we can tell from here what's going on in the big top—by what the band is playing."

The clown had purposely allowed the boy to pause at the mouth of those alleys that are called "Broadway." They are the first that you come to

on entering the dressing room. In them dress the riders and aërialists. Next come those used by the tumblers, contortionists, and acrobats.

"And last and lowest of all, clown alley itself," introduced Jim Spriggs with a wave of his club. "Only there are so many of us Joeys that it takes three of 'em to hold us. Look, fellows!" he called. "Brought a Jake in with me!"

The clowns shouted a welcome.

"What's his gag?" Felix Adler wanted to know.

"Just in time. I need a studge to carry my props," chimed Pete Mardo.

"You mean the trick needs a funny clown or two!" a voice put in from somewhere over the hat racks.

A shout of laughter greeted this sally.

"That's the way it goes all day long," Jim Spriggs said. "Always kidding back and forth. Now I've got to step. Spader Johnson, here, will look after you."

"Glad to," replied a broad-faced clown with feet encased in enormous shoes. As the blue-coated policeman hurried away to the big top, he made room for John on his trunk.

"Just in time to see a little fun," he confided, "for, as a matter of fact, we've got a sure-enough Jake—young fellow that joined out a couple of days ago. We're going to slip him the weighing gag. The boys are readying him up over there

now." He nodded toward the far end of the alley:

A moment later, two men in clown dress came up. The older one seemed highly indignant.

"Say, Spader, we've been telling Willie Green here about you being able to guess a man's weight, and dogged if he doesn't misdoubt it!"

"Does, does he? Well I've never missed a calculation yet. Just let me give him the eye."

The big-foot clown got up, walked around the newcomer, carefully felt his shoulders and back, and then ran his hand down the calves of his legs.

"Well, how much, Spader?" demanded Irving Nelson.

But instead of answering, the other only scratched one of the ears that protruded through his skullcap. Then he shook his head in a puzzled sort of way.

"By gracious, fellows, this boy's got me stumped!"

It was easy to see how pleased Willie Green was at this admission. His chest expanded a full extra inch.

"I'll own it, sonny, you've got me plumb fooled. Never saw anything like you. Tell you, though, if you don't mind letting me lift you, I think I can guess it exact."

"Go ahead," invited the other. "Go as far as you like."

"This way," requested Spaders, as he turned so

that the other's chest came against his back. "Put your arms over my shoulders so I can raise you piggy-back like." He grasped the protruded wrists, and then, with a quick hunch forward, lifted the other well off the ground.

"Now, boys!" he sang out.

Instantly from behind trunks and hat-racks came slap-sticks, paddles, and bladders on strings. Or those that had none used the flat of their hands.

"Swish! Smack! Bang!" rang the blows that fell on the victim's backside.

Performers from other alleys crowded in to see the fun.

"Hey! Hey! Lemme down!"

"Can't. Haven't figured your weight yet!" roared Spader, as the whaling went on. But he finally did. And then added, with a face so straight that it was the more comical to John, "Exactly a hundred and twenty-seven pounds and four ounces. But I'll say this for you, Willie: you kicked more and hollered less than any studge I ever weighed. You're all right—put her there!"

Cries of "He'll do!" or "Got heels like a mule!" followed Spader Johnson's speech of welcome, while Willie Green returned to his trunk grinning sheepishly.

John had pushed back against the clothes racks; but he had laughed as hard as any of the clowns.

"You certainly happened along at a pat time," Lou Morris, who was just finishing making up, told him. "That's one of the oldest gags in the business—as old as clown white itself. Or perhaps you don't know what clown white is?"

"No, sir, I don't."

"It's the body part of every straight make-up. There's a mess of it in that can there."

John looked.

"Can anybody buy it?" he asked.

"Yes, at 'most all drug stores. Or you can mix your own by taking cold cream—though lard is about as good and a lot cheaper. You heat it over an alcohol stove and then mix in powdered zinc oxide while it's hot. Once it's cooled off, you work it up well with your fingers. In making up, the muck, as it's called, is smeared over the face, ears and neck. Next, to take the greasy look away, you powder with a puff dipped in talcum. Last of all, the trimmings are added—red, blue, black, or all of them, depending upon what sort of a face you are after."

"But how do you get it off?"

"Cream or lard first, then use the grease rag, and after that plenty of soap and water. See all these buckets? They're our wash basins."

"And you'd better get it all off," warned Spader Johnson. "It's well nigh a disgrace to leave so

much as a speck in one of your ears. 'Oh-ho!' some eagle eye will say, maybe when you're on your way to the cook house. 'I see you're a clown!' "

"Now, a student will muck his face clean into his hair," Lou Morris went on, "but that's foolish because the skullcap covers the upper part. Speaking of caps, a white stocking makes the best kind of a one. You pull it down on your head, not forgetting to cover your ears. Then you get somebody to scissor off the surplus, sew it across, make slits for your ears, and you've got it. A stocking's always hemmed under at the top, and so gives the cap a nice neat edge. A lot of clowns make their own dresses. The older ones, like, say, Jules Turnour and Fred Stelling, were taught that when they were apprentices. How about it, Fred?"

"Yes, and our performing pumps, too. Many's the pair I've made when a tad."

"You should talk with Fred Stelling, if you want to get the old-time stuff," Lou Morris advised. "He's forgotten more about the game than most of us younger fellows will ever know."

"Hush up with you, Lou!" the other returned. "But come see me anytime, young gentleman, and I shall be happy to talk with you. I must hurry now."

The old clown bowed to them and then slipped away.

"That's the old school of it," Lou Morris nod-

ded. "Always thoughtful, always polite. Not many left, more's the pity. Just Little Fred, and Jules, and a few others. Come, you must meet Jules Turnour."

They made their way around buckets and stools to the far end of the alley. There a clown who looked even older than Fred Stelling rose to his feet as John was presented.

"Foster?" he repeated in a soft, musical voice. "Did you say the name was Foster? Why, I used to have a partner by that name. A clever fellow he was, too. But I must go now. You are, perhaps, passing my way?"

"Go ahead," motioned Mike Morris meaningly.

John followed the wrinkled-faced Joey into the yard.

"Props," he said, a little mournfully, pointing to a square, black box he was carrying. "We've got to have them these days. Why, it used to be that we hardly knew what such things were. That was when a clown depended on his wit and grace to entertain. But then there was but one ring. And no hippodrome track. The audience was so close that one might touch the noses of those who sat nearest.

"But of what use is fine pantomime now? Or a clever quip? Then I would say to the master of the ring, 'Scalp me will you? But, my bandy-legged dandy, how can you? I have no hair!'

And then skip away to avoid the sting of his whip. How the crowd would roar!"

He shut his eyes as if he were even then hearing the laughter.

"But now—now, there are many rings and a tent so large that people no longer want, nor could hear our jokes if we cracked them. So," he shrugged his shoulders, "we've traded the quip for the prop and our pantomime for a drum."

"Tut! Tut!" twitted Fred Stelling, who had come up behind them. "All is not lost. Haven't we still got the slap?"

"Right you are, Freddy, we have!" returned Jules.

As in a play, the two were in instant pantomime. It was quite as though they were speaking. One had wronged the other, and only the shedding of blood would satisfy honor. Little Fred made as if to draw a sword, but before he could free it from its scabbard, Jules had struck him with open palm against the cheek.

There resounded a smack so loud that John fully expected Little Fred to go rolling on the ground. But, to his amazement, the clown merely jerked his head a bit to one side and then came smilingly toward him.

"Don't feel foolish," he said, "for, if you are watching a pair who know their art, you'll miss the trick nine times out of ten, even after I've told

you how it's done. Here," he added, striking a pose. "Now, bring your right hand against the side of my jaw. Swing it full tilt, but let it land easy. Come—come ahead with it!"

John did as directed, and just as his fingers touched the clown's face he heard a crack like a whip. The slap had been sounded by Fred Stelling's own hands!

"Say!" the boy exclaimed, "I'm going to try that with one of the fellows!"

"Come see me between shows, and I'll give you some pointers, then," the old clown said, as he and Jules made toward the back door. "Suppose we meet in the dressing tent after supper is over."

"I'll not forget," John answered. Should say he wouldn't. A trick like that was something to know!

CHAPTER XXIV

JOHN BLOWS THE WHISTLE

"AH! Here you are," Fred Bradna was saying a few minutes later, as he came from the big top into the yard. "Say, maybe how would you like to go in with me and blow the whistle?"

For a moment John stared in wide-eyed astonishment.

"You don't mean—gee! you don't mean right in the circus do you?"

"Why not?" shrugged the equestrian director. "It's not hard. Besides, I will stand close by to tell you exactly when."

He placed the silver whistle to his own lips.

"You blow it just like any other kind—only sharp and quick."

It was settled that John should start the statue numbers.

"You will wait inside here until it is time," Fred Bradna said. "Then I come get you."

Beyond the curtain John found himself so near the band that he could have touched the tuba player's back. At first, to his confused ears, the music

was not music at all but only a muddle of almost deafening sound. Then, little by little, the blare became melody—a crashing melody that seemed to come to him not so much through his ears as in queer jiggling waves that flitted up and down his spine.

Past the band, he now saw Fred Bradna on the sawdust-strewn track. When he raised his arm and the whistle "burred," the music would soften, or change, or grow louder. It was as though there was a pedal cord reaching from it to the band.

But, of course, there was not. John raised himself by slipping his toe in a jack. Now he could peer over the bandsmen's heads. No—not a cord, but the bandmaster's eyes that seemed never to leave Fred Bradna's back.

There! The whistle again. Then a nod from the leader, a quick dip from his stick, and the tune took a fresh turn. This time a calliope joined in with the rest.

Often, when watching the circus, John had heard what sounded like a calliope played in the distance. Now he saw what made the notes. The thing was fixed to a platform at the rear of the band stand—a thing like a pipe organ, only its pipes were shorter. A hose as big as a boa constrictor wound under the side wall and fastened to its back, and through this hose air was pumped into a box built under the keyboard. A man

played on the keys with quick jabbing thrusts of his fingers.

Past John, as he listened and watched, went performers dressed in many colors: spangled figures that smiled at him through the crash of the music. Some wore clumsy slop shoes over their close-fitting pumps, and these made them walk in a queer clopping fashion. Clowns that he had seen in the dressing room trotted in and out. Property men moved here and there carrying heavy loads. Behind him, a man was feeding pigeons.

Beyond the rings, past the centers and the blue and red quarter poles, the grand stand rose like a hillside covered with many people. Palmleaf fans fluttered back and forth as butterflies flutter. Here and there were bright splotches made by red, and blue, and green balloons. A strip of sky wandered in and out under the scalloped eaves, and against it, the heads and shoulders of those on the topmost row looked like crows strung along on a fence. Something brushing close to him took his eyes from the grand stand. He saw a lady dressed in white. Her face was as white as her dress, and she wore white hair. Then a second and a third —now a score or more. Dog boys came in from the yard bringing silky-coated setters. Through a rift in the curtain he caught a glimpse of white horses.

Again the whistle sounded. The curtain

swished open. The horses entered, and the whole white company started toward the rings.

The music grew faster. High on trapezes, performers clad in pink and blue were whirling as though in time with it.

Faster and faster——

John felt a hand on his knee.

Fred Bradna!

"All right," he motioned. "We go now."

He led the way past the band, and across the hippodrome track to the edge of the center ring. But, whistle held in readiness, he kept his eyes on the blue and pink figures that still spun in the tent top. John saw that those in the grand stand were looking there too. But now his own eyes were attracted to something that was taking place in the ring.

A huge red-plush canopy had been let down from above until its folds completely covered a circular stage. Those of the white faces and white dress were passing in under it. Now he knew why he had never been able to discover when the things got in place! He'd always been too busy watching what was going on overhead!

Yes, that was the way of it. For, by the time Fred Bradna had again sounded the whistle and the pink and blue figures had slipped to the ground, the statues stood in readiness in under the hoods. A moment more, then, and——

He felt the whistle pushed into his hand.

"Get set!" Fred Bradna was saying. "And when I say, 'Go,' blow it quick and sharp!"

The band had stopped for the salute and applause. John put the whistle to his lips. Then he heard what seemed like a far-away voice give the word. He blew with all his might! Not a sound! At least, not to his excited ears.

Yet, there must have been, for now the band was blaring and the red canopies gliding upward. The statues acts were on. He, John Foster, had started them!

"Wait—wait," warned the equestrian director. "Ready again, now. You've got to give them the 'stop' as well as the 'go.' Wait—wa-a-it until they've made the complete revolution. NOW!"

Once more the whistle chirruped. Down came the hoods.

"Blew it like a veteran!" Fred Bradna was declaring a few minutes later, as he piloted John past the band stand. "Eh, Pat?"

The assistant equestrian director nodded emphatically.

"Got a real zip in it is what I mean," he said. "And, Fred—we've got a couple of extra ones. Maybe—do you think——" He made a sign that John did not understand.

"By George, yes!" Fred Bradna exclaimed. He put a hand in his pocket. "But, no—I got an-

other idea." Leaning over to Pat Valdo he said something in a whisper.

"Better still," nodded the other. "Well, see you some more, lad. We've got to go to work again now."

They turned back down the track.

CHAPTER XXV

SPARKEY AND THE ROSINBACKS

COMING and going, as John wandered about the back yard, he came upon clowns that he had met in the dressing room.

There was Charlie Chaplin; not the real one, but only Charlie Cheer made up to look like the funny hero of the films.

"I can do it in the circus and no one minds—not even Charlie himself," the clown said. "I know, because he and Doug came out to visit us a couple of times when we were playing in Los Angeles. Jim Spriggs put 'em under arrest. Were I to dress like him for a picture, or even on the stage, he would object. But in there"—he flipped his cane toward the big top—"it's different. All laugh, even when the joke is on themselves, and never mind at all."

"Why should they?" demanded Mike Morris from where he was tying Sparkey between the shafts of a ridiculous looking hansom cab. "That's a clown's privilege. Take it 'way back in the middle ages when Joeys were called jesters. Their prime stunt was to mimic members of the king's

Jim Spriggs put 'em under arrest.

Not the real one but only Charlie Cheer made up to look like the funny hero of the films.

court. Even poked fun at his royal nibs himself."

"But they had to be awful careful or they'd get beheaded," John remembered.

"Pshaw! It's never been my belief that that was because the king really got sore at what they did. They just weren't funny enough. Same way with clowns to-day; liable to get the ax any minute if they don't fetch the laughs.

"Yes, siree, bob," he went on, "clowning is as serious a business as any I know of. Come on over closer and take a look at old Sparkey. Handsome critter, isn't he?"

Just to look at the crazy dummy horse made you smile. And when his master began to make him jump and kick John laughed until the tears came.

"I was clowning in Switzerland, some ten years back, and one day, when rummaging through a shop, I came across a small mechanical toy," Mike Morris said. "I says to myself, 'Some day, in some way or other, I'm going to make use of this jigger!' I kept turning it over in my mind and finally decided to use the same principle in a full-sized horse. So I started in and built Sparkey. It took me two months to put him together. Look inside this trap."

The clown opened a door in the horse's back. The interior was a maze of pulley blocks, steel springs, and elastic ropes.

"Upward of a hundred parts in there," he de-

clared. "And maybe you think the critter won't bite. See this?"

He held up a finger from which the end was missing.

"Caught it in the joint of one of his hind legs a year or so ago. When I finally got him quieted down, blime me if he hadn't kept a piece of my mud hook!"

By this time, Sparkey had been hitched and Louie, the driver, had taken the reins preparatory to moving into the big top.

"Climb on in with me," invited Mike Morris. "I've always been threatening to drive down Michigan Boulevard behind him some afternoon."

As they turned the hansom cab around so that Sparkey's nose would point toward the back door, a girl wearing a pink bow in her hair called to them from one of the private dressing tents.

"When are you going to let me ride that blooded steed of yours?" she hailed.

"Not to-day, Miss May," Mike Morris replied. "Just gave him a big feed of oats, and he's as frisky as a young calf. Whoa, there!"

He had manipulated a small rope, and Sparkey's heels banged against the shafts.

"Perhaps you'd better pile out," Mike advised John. "The Pearl of Arabia is getting mighty rambunctious. Go over and talk to Miss Wirth. She'll show you some real horses."

Three splendid ones in silvery colored trappings were just being brought up to the rider's tent as John crossed to where she stood. She gave each of them a lump of sugar.

"They always look for that the first thing, the old spoiled darlings. Especially Patsy. There never was such a pet. And nerve!"

The girl threw her hands upward in a gesture of despair.

"Only last week the grooms brought him, Snow, Dick, and Skip over a bit early. Aunty, Sister Stella, and I were changing, and so our curtain was drawn. But Patsy couldn't wait for his sugar. So what did he do but come up to the curtain, stick his nose through the slit, and throw it almost all the way open! You should have heard the screams! You naughty thing!" she scolded.

But Patsy merely nosed into her hand for more sugar.

"Did your horses come from Arabia?" John asked.

"Not a single one. You'll laugh when I tell you what Snow and Patsy used to be. Give a guess."

John shook his head.

"Hearse horses! Not that that's exactly funny, only it does seem crazy to think that these two monkeys that now travel so fast once walked slow ahead of a hearse. I got them in Dayton. A Mr.

Reisinger came out to the lot, one day, saying he was discarding his horse-drawn hearse for a motorized one. He was sure I would like the horses. And he was right, because we bought them that very afternoon."

She laughed.

"Sort of changed their black plumes for silver ones, you might say. Several times since then the ring stock has passed a cemetery on the way from the cars to the lot and Tommy, the groom, vows that Snow has tried to turn in at the gate! Perhaps you have seen him work in the show. He's the one I use when I do my basket jump-up."

"I guess you like white horses best," John said.

"Yes, I believe I do," she agreed. "Besides, though, there's a very practical reason for using that kind. When a dark horse is shedding, the hair sticks to one's tights and does not look nice. Then, too, a white horse can be seen better from distant parts of the tent. Still another reason is that the rosin doesn't show on his coat. And besides all that, it's more helpful in turning a somersault to have a white back to which to return."

"Have they rosin on them now?" John asked as he patted Snow's neck.

"Yes, indeed. Run your hand along here. Feel it? It's dusted on every day. But every now and then it's removed so the back will not get sore. The grooms take a powder called fuller's earth,

"Wait—wa-a-it until they've made the complete revolution."

He placed the silver whistle to his own lips.

The other, pure white, "Meowed" and blinked up at Snow.

mix it into a paste, rub it in, and after it has dried, give the coats a thorough brushing. That cleans out every speck."

The horse called Dick had sidled over near them and now began to rub his nose against the rider's shoulder.

"Oh-ho!" she exclaimed. "Want to make up, do you—He tried to hurdle a sunbeam yesterday," she explained. "Didn't you know a horse would do that? Almost all will. This time, while I was riding, the sun crept over just far enough to send a slanting ray of light through a chink in the canvas and across the ring. Of course, Dick had to play he was a high jumper. Almost gave me a bad tumble."

"I think we'd best be getting over to the door," suggested Mrs. Wirth. "You're on in a minute or two, May."

"Righto, Aunty. But where is my other basket? Ah! Here it is.—Well will you look at this!"

She came from under the awning bringing the basket. In it were two kittens. One of them, of a coal-black coat, sprawled sleepily at the bottom. The other, pure white, "Meowed" and blinked up at Snow.

"Oh, Mrs. Loyal!" she called toward a near-by tent. "Weren't you looking for Blackie and Whitie a while ago? Well, here they are."

"The tramps!" cried Mrs. Loyal as she came to get them. "They simply will not stay at home. I guess we shall have to give them away. You see," she said to John, "the trouble is that our dogs do not like black cats. My husband says it is always so—that seldom will dogs, especially poodles, have anything to do with a black cat. A white one is all right. But Whitie loves Blackie, so when the dogs bark at him they both leave."

"Well, when you get ready to part with them, just let me know," the rider said. "I'll sign them up as mascots."

"Surely not the black one, Miss May!" protested Tommy, the groom, as they started for the big top. "'E'd bring us bad luck. Hi remember once in Haustralia——"

But the rest of the sentence was lost to John's ears.

His eyes followed the rider as she approached the back door. Near it, she handed her ribboned whip to the groom and stretched her arms high overhead as though about to dive. Quickly she brought her open hands to the ground in a long sweep. As the palms touched, her feet bounded upward with the lightness of feathers. Then palms up and feet down—feet down and palms up —a dozen times or more, her spangled costume sending out tiny whorls of twinkling light at every spring.

Now she stood arranging the ribbon bow in her hair. Then, looking back and seeing John, she touched her fingers to her lips, blew a kiss toward him, and passed in through the door.

The boy dug his hands into his pockets and walked in the direction of the little horse tent.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHAT THE BOSS HOSTLER TOLD

ALONG one side of the tent, a score or more horses had thrust their heads and necks out into the open. One of them whinnied as John idled past. He crossed under the guy ropes and began to rub the horse's nose. Odd trough-like contrivances ran from side pole to side pole. He had noticed these before without knowing why they were there. Now he saw plainly enough. They were mangers made of canvas.

"Get away from that horse!" ordered a voice from inside the tent. Obediently John backed away. But the speaker proved to be Frank Dial.

"Didn't make you at first," the ring stock boss said, as he came up to the manger. "Doing a little investigating on your own hook, eh? Guess you never saw feed bags like these before. Of course, they're just for oats and bran. Notice the rings set along the edge? That's so we can snap each horse up close to his section of the trough at feeding time. Otherwise, the moochers would be stealing from their neighbors."

"But why do you have canvas watering troughs,

Mr. Dial? There are two fine wooden ones just a little ways from here."

"Can't risk 'em," the boss answered. "I'm not saying there is anything wrong with your town horses. May all be as sound as a silver dollar. Just the same when every Tom, Dick, and Harry nag is sticking his muzzle into a public watering place, there's no telling what germs may be left behind."

A swarthy-faced man wearing a Panama hat and mounted on a roan horse had reined up near the stake line. John recognized one of the assistant boss hostlers he had met that morning.

"Howdy, Blackie," said Frank Dial.

"Howdy yourself," grinned the other. He eyed John. "Shucks, buddy, what's the idea of fooling around these dude ponies. Come along with me and I'll show you some real hosses."

"Huh!" grunted Frank Dial. "I'd like to know how you'd give a show without the ring stock."

"Give one! Wouldn't be no show to give if the baggage stock didn't pull it on to the lot!"

"No use arguing with a buckaroo," sighed the ring stock boss. "Got no more logic than a day-old Shetland. Go ahead, John, and look at his old dray horses."

Chuckling at his own retort, he gave a hand to the boy's foot and boosted him to a seat at the rear of Blackie Diller's saddle.

They crossed the lot to the big horse tents, Blackie drawing up now and then to point out something that he thought would be of interest to his passenger. One of these was a team hitched to one of the water wagons.

"See that near wheeler there?" he said. "He's Reno, one of the oldest horses around the show. Bought him at Kankakee way back in 1911—that would be fifteen years ago. And yet there are folks that will tell you circus ponies don't stand up for long. Why, there's an old-head on one of the pull-away teams that's been hanging around here well nigh twenty years. Got plumb flea-bitten in the service."

He clucked to Sammy, and they moved along.

"Horse ain't no account until he's six or better. Don't have a full mouth until along about then—meaning that he hasn't stopped shedding his teeth. Course, I don't mean that altogether serious. We got 'em four and five years old and doing good work too. But six and upward is best."

They reached the two long tents that sheltered the baggage stock. Here they dismounted, and it was here that John met the grizzled-faced Tom Lynch, who "bossed the hull of 'em." He was lounging in a deep-slung canvas chair.

He eyed the boy quizzically from under his flat-brimmed hat, shifted his cigar butt, then crossed and recrossed his knees.

"Want to know something about the horses, hey?" he repeated. "Kicking hitchin' posts, son, you've come to the wrong man. I've only been around 'em goin' on sixty year. The rooster you want to find is one of these First-o'-May skinners. After a few months, they know more about 'em than you could write down and stow away in that big top over there."

He cackled thoughtfully.

"Why, only yistiday, feller came to me wantin' to hire out as a long-string driver. 'I'm an old-timer,' says he to me. 'Y'are, are you?' says I. 'Been drivin' on and off for nine year,' he comes back. Nine year!" the baggage stock boss snorted scornfully. "Do you get that, Blackie? Drivin' nine year and called himself an old-timer! Sufferin' lead bars, what's the business a-comin' to, anyhow!"

He swung around in his chair, laughed his low cackling laugh, and clapped John on the knee.

"But 'tain't fair to be takin' that out on you, sonny. You want to know what makes a good circus horse, eh? Well, to start with, he's got to be a good shipper. For no matter what his other p'ints may be, a poor shipper is bound to sweat and worry himself to pieces in the cars at nights. On that account, he's got to learn to lay down under a tent and do most of his snoozing in daylight. Now, you'd think that would be a simple

enough thing to ask, wouldn't you? Fact is, though, less than fifty per cent. of horses that are snortin' fine in every other way, refuse p'int-blank to stretch out under canvas. Second place, a circus horse has got to have lots of belly, so's he can pull well and pull low. You'll hear a buyer that knows his business object to a horse, sayin' he's got 'too much wind under him,' meanin' his body's too high off the ground. Too long in the legs. On top of that, a right horse ought to be short-coupled —not too long from rump to shoulder. A short-coupled Percheron is as good as any made. He's big footed, and feet play a mighty important part. A mule ain't worth a cent for circus work. For one thing, his feet, bein' dainty, sink in the mud. For another, they won't stand up under poundin' over paved streets. Now, what's the next question you've got in that book of yours?"

"What a flea-bitten horse is, sir."

"He's one that's reached the age when he's turned white-haired, with little rust flecks showin' up on his coat. For, barrin' a few exceptions, the only horses that are ever born white are them we call 'pink-skins'—like you'll see here and there over in Frank Dial's department. All our white draught horses had a color of one kind or another when they was young. Take a steel-gray. After while, he turns to a dark dapple, then a light dap-

He crossed under the guy ropes and began to rub the horse's nose.

"Sending 'em off around the big top," Blackie said.

ple, and then the dapples disappear altogether and he gets plumb white. He may stay white till he dies, though more often he'll turn flea-bitten."

"Mr. Snellen says some of the old horses know as much as the drivers," John said.

"And Happy's right," nodded the boss hostler. "Drat if I don't think the average all the way through is in favor of the stock. 'Leave 'em alone! Leave 'em alone!' is what I've got to be preachin' all season long. Take it when an eight-horse team has to make a sharp corner. A good pair of leaders will know exactly how much of a swing-out to make in order to fetch up right.

"Or take it on a dark night, with the torches a Sunday run apart, and somethin' wrong with the town juice plant, and the street lights all out. I've seen that happen fifty—yes, a hundred times. Leave your team alone. Lordy, lordy! Leave 'em alone! Let the reins sag. They'll never run you off the road. Why, a wise team will pass through a hub-to-hub openin' and never touch a hair."

Tom Lynch pounded one arm of his chair to drive home his point. Then he leaned back again.

"Pretty nearly every horse that goes wrong does it because somebody's mistreated him or just hasn't got calculation," he went on. "We're all guilty at one time or another. Did Frank Dial happen to

tell you about Silver? Well, that's as pretty a tale as I know on."

The boss puffed at his smouldering cigar.

"Never was a handsomer horse than Silver. Ain't one now—nowhere. But, for a long time, that appeared to be his best quality. Bought him originally for high-school breakin'. He did fair—but no more'n fair. Almost, but not quite good enough to take the track. Then we tried him on chariots. Upstandin' a steed as you'd want to see. And when he galloped down the hippodrome with that tail and mane of his bannered to the breeze! —Well, sir, I tell you, he was a picture. But he give trouble on the turns. So they sent him back to the barn. Three times that I know on, Frank was for sellin' him. Then somebody'd object. He was such a killin' purty rascal. And gentle as a lamb. So he hung on for another season or two, goin' in tournament, but otherwise not earnin' his salt.

"Well, sir, last winter, the company decided to put on a high-jumpin' number—horses clearin' hurdles and all like that. The boys at quarters tried out a dozen or more horses—some good, and some just fair to middlin'. But they needed a couple of stars. Then, one day, somebody in fun-like says, 'Why not give old Silver a chance?' Everybody laughed. But they brought him out.

"Say!" and the boss leaned over to thump John

on one knee. "In less than a month, that failure of five years had developed into the champion jumper of the troupe! To-day he's not only clearin' a barrier, but eight of his buddies to boot—all in one jump!

"The answer? We'd simply been tryin' to jam a round peg into a square hole, Silver not bein' able to tell us what his real suit was. So, as I said in the beginnin', we're all guilty of lackin' good sense now and then."

"Speaking of mistakes, tell John the old wagon-show story," Blackie Diller suggested.

The boss laughed.

" 'Tain't really my yarn," he objected, "and contrary to the story about Silver, I'm not here to vouch for it. Anyhow, though, in the days when shows traveled from town to town by team, there was an outfit owned by a feller the name of Rogers. Seems they'd torn down and packed up one particular black night and started for their next stand. The main gaffer was in a buggy follerin' at the tail of the wagon train when along about two bells a van scout galloped back to say they'd just struck a piece of extra fine road.

"Now, the haul was a long one, and so Rogers passed the word for every team to trot as long as the road stayed good. Trot they did. They trotted, and trotted, and they trotted some more. Every ten minutes or so Rogers kept expectin'

they'd leave the good dirt and get into the chucks. But they didn't. Then daylight finally sifted through the dark. When it did, I'm told you could 'a' heard Rogers swearin' from here to Minneapolis.

"In the darkness, they'd drove into a race track, and for two hours or more had simply been travelin' around and around in a circle!"

So, the boss hostler spinning his yarns, John sat on an up-turned bucket listening into the waning afternoon. Behind them, the hundreds of roans and dapple grays snoozed on deep beds of yellow straw, or having finished their sleep, stood munching their hay. Now and then there came the stamp of heavy feet, or that fluttering of the lips that horses make when straw tickles their noses.

Men worked in and around the long aisles formed by the broad rumps and switching tails, spraying bodies and legs with a pungent fluid to keep the flies away. Some were oiling harness or polishing hame-tips until the knobs of brass shone with the brightness of new coins.

The boy learned many things. Learned how, when the teams were loaded in the cars, the wheel horses were always the first to enter. Then, supposing it was an eight-horse team, the "four-horse body" pair went in next; then the two called the "six-horse body"; and last of all the leaders. Thus they came out in the morning in correct align-

ment. It was but another example of that "big-show system" which forbade the making of two moves where one would serve.

"Many a one in there has traveled a furrow," Tom Lynch said, at another juncture of their talk. "Like, for example, a farmer has a particularly fine span of dapples. More than once, maybe, an admirin' neighbour has said, 'Luke, that team of yourn is far too purty for to be pullin' a plow. Ought to be with a circus, that's where they ought to be.' That sets Luke thinkin'. Then, one day, we come along, and he brings them up to the horse tents. I've bought or traded for hundreds of 'em right from this spot where you and me's sittin' now. After that, Luke gets to be sort of a hero in the community. Got horses with the circus. For, though we've bought 'em, he always kind of feels that they're still his, in a way. He'll come around visitin' ever' time we're near, and, like as not, bring a neighbor or two along."

The boss told about the "old-heads," as he and Blackie Diller called the horses that had been with the show for many years.

"Get wiser'n an owl's grandpap," he declared. "Watch some of 'em this evenin' after they've been hooked up but the wagon not yet ready to move. Lay right down in the harness and snooze between the traces. Or if you're around sometime when the lot's soft from rain, keep your eyes on

almost any pair of leads. They'll pull just so much. Then they'll stop and crane their necks around, sayin' just as plain as though they was talkin', 'Well, we've done our best. How about a hook-rope team?'

"Remember the rings you saw used when the pull-over team snaked the wagons over the runs? There're several such rings on every wagon—corners, sides, and at the back. Now, the hook-rope teams are those you'll see hangin' around a lot on a sticky morning, appearin' to be doin' nothin' in particular—until they're wanted. When that time comes, they're hooked a-front of the team that's already hitched to a mired wagon, or into the side rings. I've many a time seen five hook-rope teams used on a single wagon. That means upward of sixty-five horses. They'll drag it out or pull the gear from under the bed. And mostly our wagon makers don't built that kind o' chariots."

They visited the hospital tent where horses were lounging on the straw, nosing into hot bran mashes, or napping in the sun.

"Of course, we have sprains now and then, and some rope burns and skinned hocks," Tom Lynch said. "But my theory is that, for the most part, a sick horse is nothin' more than a tired one. Give him a few days of rest and tease him back

on to his feed with a little meal puddin', and he'll soon be nickerin' for the collar again."

As they came back to the big tent, a dozen horses tossed their heads at sight of the boss hostler and set up a concerted whinny.

"They know it's time for the evening feed of oats," he chuckled. "Wise! I should say they are. Don't suppose you ever heard of Spencer Delavan? Dead now. One of the greatest boss hostlers that ever lived. Del used to say he could take any nag that walked, ask him three questions, and decide on the spot whether he'd make a trouper. Nope, never would tell me what the questions was. But, I tell you, sonny, if a fellow could just get on to horse lingo and find out what's goin' on in them heads in there, he'd be smarter'n a professor.

"And hearin' that nickerin' reminds me of gettin' over to the cook house myself. That's what you'd better be doin' too, if you don't want to miss the flag."

CHAPTER XXVII

WITH BLACKIE DILLER AGAIN

FROM where John sat in the cook tent, that evening, he saw the kitchen partly dismembered, the steam tables holding enough food for those that were yet to be served.

The cooks, now turned scrubbers, carried in buckets of water from the steam-boiler wagon. With this they doused the tops of their serving boards and then applied brushes. Others scalded the big copper caldrons, while some unhooked them from the pipes that led to Hank Hill's wagon. But the kettles were not loaded separately. John saw that each of the six was made just sufficiently smaller than its neighbor to allow them to be "nested" one in the other. So they were loaded—not as six, but as one.

Through the opening that had by now been made across the kitchen, he discovered Hank Hill raking the coals from his fire box. Ranges were being lifted to the place under which the "taters" were cooked. Now the stack of the boiler wagon —fashioned after a telescope—was pulling its

soot-covered hood down into the roof much as a turtle draws its head in under its shell.

Not an inch of space but what was used in that wagon! Pots, griddles, and pans stowed in this nook and that.

Bang! Up went the sides.

The table tops, still steaming from their scalding bath, were lifted from the jacks that had supported them through the day, carried out, and lashed to the wagon. Jacks, closed with a rattle and snap, followed close after.

In the long end of the dining tent, the last meal had been served. Farther along at the rear, the pearl divers were washing the last of the dishes. Plates, cups, saucers, and tumblers clattered into the crockery chests.

Long-end flunkies loosened the slip knots that supported the side wall. Others stripped the tables of their oilcloth coverings. A third crew carried the tops, seats, and jacks out into the open.

There wagons were awaiting them. Hitched to the wagons were the teams that awaited the loading. Down at the runs, the razorbacks awaited the wagons; and at Smithville, sixty miles away, were those who would soon be awaiting the flying squadron, just as John and Willie Carr had awaited it that very morning.

It was the teams that John saw first when he came out from supper. Then he looked for the

big horse tent where he had sat with Tom Lynch. It and the other were gone!

The last of their center poles were just being lowered. Where the tents had been there now stood long lines of baggage stock, fully harnessed, the polished hame-tips aglow in the late afternoon sun. Now and again, a team of four or six would swing away from the lines and move toward some cook-house wagon that had yet to be loaded, or take its place in front of one that was to pull horse-tent canvas off to the runs.

Assistant hostlers on horseback were directing the teams. Blackie Diller galloped up to where John stood watching.

"Sammy's feeling pretty spry this evening," he hailed. "Don't believe he's got weight enough over him. Better come on up."

With the aid of a wagon wheel, John climbed up behind.

"Sending 'em off around the big top," Blackie said, as he pointed toward the wagons. And John knew what that meant, for he remembered the "road" that Happy Jack Snellen had laid out that morning.

They passed teams of four, six and eight horses.

"Those with four have a driver only, or a 'skinner,' as we say," Blackie explained; "but every team of six and upward carries a helper, too."

"Strings means reins, doesn't it?" John asked.

"Yep, and a 'long-string' driver is one that handles eight or more horses but never less than eight. I want to tell you, it's no small chore to swing that many ribbons. Takes a real pair of mits just to lift the weight of 'em. There are times when you wish you had twenty fingers instead of ten and a couple of hams for hands."

Sammy took them past the blacksmith wagon, for the canvas roof was now down and loaded.

"We call it that," agreed Blackie, "though it's a horseshoeing and harness-repairing establishment, as well. All our horses are shod there, unless one happens to throw an iron going to or from the lot. Then he's shod cold. Guess, maybe, you didn't see the shoer who prowls the haul route. Next trip, you watch for a chap with a canvas sack over his shoulder who's fooling along maybe just doing nothing. He's always on call. Then, if a horse casts a shoe, one of us assistants gallops back after him, and he puts another one on."

Much as John had seen, he now began to realize that there was much that he had missed.

"Don't you be feeling bad about that, though," Blackie consoled him. "Why, I'd bet Sammy here that you've picked up more than any other chap that's ever visited. You'd have to be with it for a season and come provided with eyes behind your ears to get everything. Then, like as not, you'd overlook some gimix or other.

"Land of grandmothers! there's no end to the ins and outs of a thing this big," he went on, as he swept the lot with his broad, sun-tanned hand. "Generally speaking, though, you might say it's divided into three parts. The train department moves it from one stand to another and puts it on the ground. That ends their troubles. Next, it's the business of the baggage stock department to get the thing on to the lot. Following that, it's up to the bosses of the different lot departments to look after it while it's here. Same thing happens at night, only it's reversed.

"Of course, different departments help one another out in a pinch. When war was on and Jimmy Whalen was limping along with sometimes less than thirty men when he ought to have ten times that many, I've seen Ollie Webb send his boys over to help on big top. I've seen star performers, like Ernie Clarke, put on jumpers and drive stakes and carry seat lumber. Ain't never no foolishness among circus folks when the old mud opera is in trouble. Everybody works. But there's a funny thing about one department getting help from another. A boss that's short-handed would rather cut off one of his arms and hand it to you than ask for assistance. If another boss offers his men, he's glad to have them. But he'd never run up an SOS—not in a hundred years."

Sammy had stopped near the yard side of the

big top to nip at a clump of grass. But, after a moment, Blackie pulled him up.

"Well, I've got to shake a hoof. Where'll I set you down?"

"I was to see Mr. Stelling," John answered.

"See who? Oh, you mean Butterfly Stelling. Cut right in between those two property wagons, there. That'll bring you out in front of the big dressing tent. See you next year, I hope."

And with a cluck to Sammy, Blackie Diller galloped from sight around the big top.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE OLD CLOWN'S STORY

THE boy found the one the assistant boss had called "Butterfly" Stelling sitting on his trunk in the far corner of the men's dressing tent. But if the clown had not called out, John would never have recognized him.

For now he was dressed in an everyday suit, while his face, except for its lines and the deep-set eyes, looked wholly unlike that which John had seen with its layer of clown white and red and blue markings.

A pair of steel-rimmed spectacles was set well down toward the tip of his nose, while a book of more than average size lay open across his knees.

"Just been reading up a bit," he said, as he made a place for John beside him. "See this? Best book on dogs that was ever written. That Spot of mine has been ailing a little lately, and blessed if I can figure out what the trouble is. I think I've found it described here, though. I'll mix him up a little medicine to-night.

"Sort of a hobby of mine—doctoring purps. I suppose I've got twenty books on the subject at

home. The boys here in the alley call me the Dog Doc."

He closed the book.

"So you're going to try the slap with one of your young friends, eh? My! My! how many years ago it has been since I started learning that trick. For, you see, I was born in the show business—born in England more years ago than I've now got hairs in this old pate of mine."

He laughed as he smoothed the top of his head.

"My father was a clown and mother a tight-rope dancer, though she rode well, too. They remember father in Ireland to this very day. Far and wide, through every village and hamlet, he was known as 'Peg Leg' Stelling. One day, while running after another clown, he tumbled over a bucket, cut his shin, and the dye from his tights poisoned the flesh. He neglected the hurt, and the neglect cost him his leg. But he always claimed it was a blessing and that it helped him fetch the laughs.

"He'd tell of a time when he was riding on top of a bus in London. A lady attempting to cross in front of him tripped and fell. 'Why don't you move your umbrella out of the way!' she demanded. 'Lady,' retorted father, 'that's not my umbrella—that's my wooden leg!'

"There were nineteen of us children, though only eight of us lived beyond infancy.

"As soon as we were old enough, we were put to work, though often it could scarcely be called by so serious a word.

"As for me, my first appearance was not in any ring or on a stage, as the saying goes, but in the air. And what do you suppose I impersonated? A cherub!

"Ah! but you must not be surprised. For I was a daintier morsel then than I am now. Even the Queen would say that were she alive to-day—and God bless her."

"The Queen!" exclaimed John.

"Queen Victoria," the other said. "You see, a company of players were to do a fantasy by royal command. My father was one of them. In a part of the play, the action called for a cherub, and I was that 'beautiful child.' About all I can remember is that I was very cold in my flimsy dress and, once they had swung me up to where I was to come out of the clouds, pretty badly frightened. In fact, I was so scared that, when they lowered me down into view of the audience, I kept my eyes tight shut and so didn't even see the Queen! Then, once I was hauled heavenward again and swung in back to the floor, I bawled like a good fellow. For, in his haste, the man who manipulated the rope had bumped me against the side of a cloud.

"As I grew older, I took part in my father's

numbers. He would bring me into the ring in a carpet bag, pitch it carelessly upon the ground, and then I would pop out. That never failed to fetch a laugh. Next, I would be helped to a horse fitted with a broad pad. From the forward edge of the pad, a rope ran upward to my hands, and, by holding to this, I would stand upright as the horse cantered around the ring.

"As I did the circle, father would sing an old song that was a great favorite in those days. It had an interminable number of verses—enough to last as long as the audience cried for more. At the end of each one there came the refrain, 'From Wombledon to Wimbledon is fourteen miles!' It was my job to join in on this chorus. I'd squeal lustily, sounding more like a pig than a daring equestrian. And at every repetition of the word 'miles' I would give a quick squat and then bound upright again. Sometimes, when the song took especially well, I'd do what seemed to me a hundred 'squats' at a clatter. And by the time father took me off the horse and tossed me back into that old carpet bag I can tell you I was pretty wobbly in the shanks. It has always been my opinion that whoever said it was only fourteen miles from 'Wombledon to Wimbledon' merely dreamed the distance. I know it was thirty, at least.

"Still, those were but infant days. I was not

counted a performer, but was merely filling in, or 'dressing the act,' as it was called. So, when I had reached the ripe age of seven years, my parents apprenticed one of my brothers and me to a showman that I might 'learn the business.'

"The showman's name was Cook. We were taught to call him the master. A hard master he was, and a severe one. Woe to the pupil who disobeyed or sassed back! His wife we called 'Mother.'

"I should explain to you that in England and in Europe, at any rate, in those days, a small circus would put up in a town and play there for several weeks. We were apprenticed in such a one as that and the master and mother lived in a small house some distance from the show tents, and we with them. We went to practise at seven each morning. The old lady would jot down the time we left, and the master remember when we had arrived. At night they would compare notes and if these showed we had loitered on the way, a good licking was the result.

"I served five years with this master and learned many things. I learned dancing and posing in order to have grace in standing on a horse. The arms had to be just so, also the hands, fingers, and legs, particularly the instep and toes.

"The master would bend my instep by pressing the toes over his knee, or bend my feet until the

bones cracked and the tears came. That was to perfect what he called the 'pointed toe.' Bless you, it's a wonder I have any feet left.

"But of course it was the thing," he went on. "I am old now, some of the grace is gone, perhaps. But it was there once upon a time. After five years of work it had to be there. Yes, that was called 'cracking the instep.'

"Then there was 'side practice.' I would stand holding my hands against the back of a chair, then throw first the right leg and then the left out sideways and then backward—three to four hundred times each day and every day of the year. The master said that this, more than anything else, taught a performer poise and balance—made him graceful and a finished artist, who might enter and leave a ring to good account.

"Besides all else, we were taught manners and given hard lessons in restraint. After we had come to take part in performance, we were assigned our places in the dressing room. When we entered it, we said, 'Good-evening, gentlemen, all.' When we were dressed, we had to sit on our trunks until it was time for our act. Sit there in silence. When the performance was over, we bowed as we went out, saying, 'Good-night, gentlemen, all.'

"We were taught never to show our feelings in public. If there was any crying to be done because of a hurt we were to do it after we had got well

out of sight of the audience. If we so much as whimpered in the ring, it meant a good licking when we reached the dressing tent."

The old clown took off his spectacles and placed them methodically in his pocket. John sat very still. The soft voice went on, thoughtfully.

"After all, it's not such a hard lesson to learn. I recall a time when I was thrown by my horse into the seats. The fall broke my collar bone. Yet I finished my act and the audience knew nothing of it. That's the game.

"Let's see, how long did I say I was with the master?"

"Five years," John reminded him.

"A good listener," the clown smiled back. "Five long years, it was. Then, our time up, my father took brother and me away from Cook and bound us out to Harry Manley, a gypsy. Manley gave us corduroy pants and bright-colored shirts for working clothes, and taught us to drive stakes, put up tents, clip horses, and splice ropes. We made our own pumps and sewed spangles on our dresses. Yes, that's the word—we called our costumes dresses. We cleaned and filled the old-fashioned petroleum lamps. We helped dig rings and make the banks of earth. For there were no wooden curbings in those days—you took the loose earth dug from the ring's floor and mounded it around the circle.

"At first we had no act of our own, but we filled in, in almost every act with the show—carrying acts, acrobatics, hat spinning and throwing, and high and low juggling. We even posted bills.

"When the show reached a town, we would be sent out before breakfast to put them up. I can remember one dreary morning as though it were but yesterday. The old man had started us out around five o'clock. By seven, we were hungry as hunters. There was some paste left—the kind that's made with flour and water—just about enough to post the last of the bills. The question was whether that paste was to go 'up or down.' It didn't take us long to decide on the 'downward' course. So we left the bills unposted and ate the paste! A little cold for a breakfast dish, but it wasn't so bad."

He paused. Droning voices filtered in through the sidewall. A mandolin sent metallic fragments of a waltz tune toward them.

"I fear my tale is a pretty hit-and-miss one, young gentleman," the old clown continued. "For that bit of music makes me think of what I should have told you earlier in the story—about being apprenticed. In my day, the law of Great Britain did not permit parents to bind out a girl or boy to the circus business. The agreement between them and the master read, 'for music and dancing only.' But they taught us the business just the

same. Only when the Humane Society lady called to see us now and then there would be some such dialogue as this:

"'Do you like your music and dancing?'

"'Oh, yes!'

"'Are your master and mother good to you?'

"'Oh, yes!'

"'Do they ever whip you?'

"'Oh, no!'

"'Do you get plenty to eat?'

"'Oh, yes!'

"You see we had been warned before-hand of the visit and had all our answers ready.

"To tell the truth we were given plenty to eat. But in a rather original way. The old lady would stuff us with plum duff or currant pudding, which we liked, and after we were filled to the gills, she would bring on the meat!

"Of course, pudding was a whole lot cheaper than beef. But somehow, we thrived, just as boys always do."

He paused again and smiled at the thought of it.

"Did you get to do any act just by yourself?" John asked after a little.

"Yes, the very first year that I was with Manley," nodded the clown. "I was 'The Big and Death-daring Free Outside Attraction.' So they described the high-rope act, and I'll never forget

the first time I did it. Frightened? That's a small word!

"Of course, I'd had practice of a sort, but my first real public appearance came about as the result of a rather sly bargain. For some cause that I've forgotten now, the old man had locked me up and kept me for a good many hours on nothing but bread and water. It was while I was thus cooped in that his high-rope walker became suddenly ill. He knew I'd always been afraid of the high rope, but now he needed a substitute in the worst way. So he blarneyed me into it.

" 'Now, Fred,' says he, coming to the room in which he had jailed me, 'you know I ain't never had a tuppence o' hard feelin' agin you. Locked you up, maybe. Can't deny that. But it's allus been for your own good. Never was a time when it didn't hurt me a far more'n it did you to do it.'

"And, switch me, if he didn't make as if to wipe his eyes! I knew he was salving, but he surely had my curiosity aroused.

" 'I been thinkin' it over,' he went on, 'and if you'll promise to do the high rope for me to-day I'll let you go free this very minute. Free as a 'awk. Never lock you up again, either. And what's more, have mother fix you just anything you want to eat. What do you say to that?' he cried, clapping me on the shoulder.

"Believe the old crocodile? Not for a minute. But I was hungry, awful hungry, and so I promised.

"Well, when I had gorged myself, it was time to dress.

"The act was done in this fashion: The band wagon was drawn up a fair distance from the tent. A small pole was lashed to it and a rope stretched across from this and made fast to the center pole. My flaming red costume, called a demon dress, was in one piece, with a hood and horns, and was all covered with spangles.

"The musicians sat in the band wagon, and, to the tune of 'The Conquering Hero Comes,' I was to come from the tent and ascend a ladder that took me to the driver's seat. From there, I was to walk the rope to the center pole and back again.

"Well, I finally came out. But I was far from being the hero heralded by the music. My knee-caps were jiggling up and down under my scarlet suit like blobs of jelly. With wobbly legs I climbed the ladder and made as if to start. The band was tooting for dear life, and the villagers gaping with open mouths from the ground. How I wanted to back down! But I could see the master making threatening signs to me from behind the crowd, and I knew what that meant—more bread and water. I made three attempts, and finally started across.

"To steady the walking rope, the old man had small ropes spliced in at intervals, and these were held taut by boys who hung on to them from the ground. But since a boy on one side would be pulling harder than the lad on the other, the rope I was walking was as crooked as a snake. And that didn't help matters.

"I ought to add that men carrying a square of carpet trailed along under me in case I should fall. But I knew that bit of carpet—it was full of holes!

"I can tell you, I was glad when I got far enough along to see the tent top under me! And once there, I simply refused to make the return trip, but skedaddled past the bail ring and slid down the center pole instead. But then, I was only twelve."

"Did you ever do it again?" John asked breathlessly.

"Scores of times. But never without being mortally afraid. For while it was only about seventy feet from the band wagon to the center pole, it never seemed less than seventy miles to me.

"No, I never did 'The Conquering Hero Comes' as I suppose a real conqueror should. And once, when we were giving a matinée, I refused outright to do the act. I could see that the sun was going to be square in my eyes. Besides, the old man was away billing the next village, so I defied

the old lady. But I knew I'd catch it later on. In spite of my attempts to dodge him, he caught me late that afternoon.

"'You little varmint!' he cried, for that was a favorite word of his. 'Why didn't you do the high rope to-day?'

"'I was afraid to do it, papa, because you were away,' I pleaded. The blarney let me off with a good kick in the pants.

"I remember that it didn't hurt much, but it so happened that some villagers saw the kick. In half a minute, there was no end of a to-do. The old man was surrounded, and before I knew what had happened, someone was hustling me away.

"For a few minutes, I didn't know what it was all about. Then I was given to understand that I was being 'rescued.' I was taken by a very kind lady and gentleman to a little vine-covered cottage where supper was just about to be served. My goodness, the fuss they made over me! You would have thought I was a sick tabby-cat. They sat me on a hair-stuffed chair and gave me all sorts of things to eat."

"What?" asked John.

"Oddly enough, I can't remember. I was thinking about that experience only the other day, and all that comes back to me is that there were hot peas in vinegar! Anyhow, I know I was having

a simply grand time of it when the daughter of the house burst into the room shouting,

"'Oh, mamma! They are having such fun at the circus. They are tearing it all to pieces, and they've run the band wagon into the pond. The police came, or they would have burned everything up!'

"I dropped my spoon and could not eat another bite. I bolted for the door and ran as tight as I could go back to the show to help out. I said to myself, 'This will all be blamed on me!'

"And it was. For a long time afterward, the old man would now and then say, 'You little varmint! You had my tent pulled down!' But I think he had had his lesson. He never kicked me again."

"But couldn't you have run away right at the start?" John asked.

"Yes, but only to be caught and brought back. For, once a boy was bound out for a certain number of years, that settled it. He was the property of the man to whom he was apprenticed. Such was the law. Besides, that was the way of it in trades as well as in the circus business in those days. When a family was large, it was the thing to do. Why, bless your heart, young gentleman, my parents were no different from others. They felt that they were doing well by me to place me

in the way of learning a profession. And so they were.

"It takes long years to become what we of the circus call an 'all-round performer,'" the clown went on, a little sadly. "Then, once that is accomplished, we leave most of our learning behind and become—in my case at least—only a clown. For this is the day of specialists and specialties, even in our game. Yet, before I gave up the rest, I attained a small measure of fame. Though I do say it myself, I was once considered one of the best hurdle-act riders in Europe, and I did a bounding rope in no mean manner. But now all that has been left for younger legs than these old pins of mine.

"But, there: enough of an old duffer's babblings. Come on, now, let's have the slap!"

He leaped to his feet.

"Here, the other way; this time it's you that will take the smack. Good!" he applauded as John brought his hands together with a crack, "only a little late. Remember, you've got to give the clap the instant my hand hits your jaw. Once more!" A dozen times they repeated it. Then they reversed their positions and went at it again.

Strangely enough, the boy was out of breath long before the man, and when, finally, the clown called a halt, his eyes twinkled in the mellow light.

"Side practice!" he warned, with an upraised

finger. "Remember, four hundred kicks from the chair back to-morrow!"

But John was panting too hard to make answer. When he did speak, it was to ask a question.

"Blackie Diller told me you were called 'Butterfly.' Is that so, Mr. Stelling?"

"For years and years it has been so. It's because of the act that I do on the track in my butterfly suit. Here's the whip." He lifted it from his clothes rack. "I tie a piece of paper to the lash and then chase it about until——"

"Oh! I know!" John exclaimed. "You make believe to catch it with your hat, only it moves every time you do!"

"I see you remember," said Butterfly Stelling softly. He meditated for a moment; then got down his hat. "I was going to do a bit of mending," he added, half to himself. "But it can wait. Come, lad, by George, we will have a lark together. You've been such a good listener to the story of this old hulk's schooling that I'm of a mind to show you a bit of how it's done to-day."

"You mean how performers are taught?" John asked in surprise.

"Well, not quite that, perhaps, but how those that are ambitious get on apace. But come and see."

Wonderingly, John followed eagerly at his heels. If he thought at all, it was to suppose that

they were bound for a tent, perhaps to a place where some "master and mother" were busy "cracking the instep" of small boys and girls. Or where——

Instead, the clown took him across the yard and into the big top.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SCHOOL IN THE BIG TOP

BUT what a different big top from that which John had left after blowing the whistle! No band music now, and in place of people, only tier after tier of vacant seats.

And yet the tent was not empty. To the right and left, on stages and in rings, John saw small knots of persons engaged in some sort of practice. A bit down the track, two men were juggling gilt-covered clubs. Not far beyond them, another was teaching a horse to kneel to the ground. Even dogs were performing down near the connection.

"We are in luck," he heard Fred Stelling saying. "A lot of them at it this evening. But there is no use in trying to see everything at once. Come —we will go to where the young miss is working on the wire."

They crossed to a stage.

Two low jacks, braced at either side of the platform, supported a steel wire that had been strung scarcely a foot above the floor. On the wire stood a young girl, dressed in sweater and bloomers and

balancing herself by means of an umbrella. An older woman was instructing her.

"No, no!" the woman was saying. "You'll never get anywhere if you watch your feet. Remember that you must always keep your eyes exactly where the wire disappears through the fork of the jack. That's it! That's better! Why, you'll be doing a fast run before you know it!"

But as though the praise had confused her, the girl at this moment lost her footing and jumped to the stage. They both laughed.

"You forgot to 'find the wire,'" the instructor said, "and never forget that you must do that at every step. Just a wee tap with the ball of your foot. Here, let me show you again."

With a quick step she was on the slender thread, but in perfect balance.

"Now, watch my feet—I'll go very slowly."

Methodically, almost like a slow-motion picture, she raised her right foot, gave a slight tap with it against the wire as she brought it down, and then put her weight on it. Next the left foot—always moving and gradually increasing the speed.

"After while, the tap and the step come to be almost simultaneous," she called. "Just a brush, and then on—a brush and then on. But always find the wire, else some day you'll be stepping into nothing but air."

"And when the wire is at full height, that would

mean a nasty fall," Fred Stelling said to John. "As the pupil advances, it's raised bit by bit until it's the way you see it in performance."

"But the young lady—she isn't somebody from right here at home, is she?"

"Bless you, no! She's one of those for whom you blew the whistle in statues this afternoon. But she's ambitious and wants to learn the tight wire. If she sticks at it she will be in an act some day and so get more salary. But let us be getting over to where yonder riding lesson is in progress."

They passed to one of the end rings. Here another beginner, dressed much like the first, was seated on a horse. Around her waist she wore a wide leather belt to which a rope was attached. The rope ran upward to a pulley and then down to the hands of a man who stood near the center of the ring.

"The apparatus is called a mechanic," the old clown told John. "Look again, and you will see that the pulley is on a swivel so that the rope does not become twisted when the horse circles the ring."

Pushing herself to an upright position, the girl stood on the mount's broad back. As the horse started, she held her balance by means of a strap attached to the bit.

"We call that the stand-up-rein and, of course, it's used only by beginners."

"What is the very first thing to learn, Mr. Stelling?"

"Just what the young Miss is trying to do now—to get to the feet and then remain there while the horse canters. And it's a large part of the battle.—Ah! She's gone!"

At the exclamation, John saw the rider make a frantic grab at space and then topple backward over the haunches. But already the man at the mechanic had pulled on the rope. For a moment, she dangled about like a spider, and was then gently lowered until her feet touched the ground. But she was soon on the horse again. Then a few steps, another spill—and so, time after time, until her cheeks grew rosy from the exertion.

"She'll get on," the clown nodded, "because she's persistent. But what a lot of work there is ahead of her! For, before she can hope to become merely an ordinary rider, she will have to learn the toe-to-pommel, the foot-back, the foot-around, and foot-on-the-neck. And, with all respect to her—never a great rider. For no one who has not begun as early as his or her tenth or twelfth year can ever hope to become truly great on a horse or in the air."

"Could she learn to jump like—like Miss Wirth?"

"Never. With the aid of the little slanting

jump-up board, yes. But there is as much difference between doing the jump with a board and doing it from the floor of the ring as there is between my face and yours. Miss May, you remember, jumps straight from the ground.

"Those little differences," Fred Stelling repeated, shaking his head. "I sometimes wonder if the public realizes how much they mean. I'm afraid not. You've seen Ernie Clarke and his brother perform? But of course you have. Here, we can see their rigging from where we are standing now. Do you note that guyed-off piece of board? It is called the pedestal. But no one ever stands upon that pedestal but Ernie Clarke—and that's my point. For when he swings off and leaves the flying bar to catch his brother Charlie's hands, there is no one on the pedestal to straighten it for him or cast it back for his return. He must leave that bar so that it will take care of itself. And of all the fine things in Ernie Clarke's act, that is the most difficult."

The old clown smiled.

"I remember hearing an admirer question him one day. Among other things, the gentleman wanted to know what 'thought passed through his brain when he let go in midair.' You should have seen his face when Ernie answered. I'm of a mind he supposed he was going to be told some-

thing highly dramatic. What Ernie said was, 'Why, always the same thing—Have I left the bar straight?'

"For, you see, if both his hands should not have left it at exactly the same instant," Fred Stelling continued, "the bar would dangle, and with no partner on the pedestal to put it right, could never be returned to."

"But the net would catch him, wouldn't it?" John asked.

"Ah, but the trick would not be carried to completion if a fall were included."

"I see. Of course, anybody could tumble into a net."

"No, anybody couldn't," contradicted the clown. "To fall and not be hurt is quite a thing in itself. When he starts to go, the performer must try to somersault or twist to the back. I recall a Japanese being killed in Paris. He missed, landed in the net straight on his feet and the rebound sent him forward to light again square on his face and chest. The whip-up broke his back. But here is a pleasanter subject."

They had stopped at another stage where a boy even younger than John was being taught handsprings. Like the girl on the horse, he, too, wore a leather belt, but of a slightly different kind. On the two outer sides of the belt were snap hooks with swiveled heads, and to these short pieces of

rope were attached. Two men, one on either side of him, held the ropes.

"No, he's not 'bound out,'" Fred Stelling laughed. "Frankie's just trouping along with his folks for a little vacation and his father and brother are giving him a bit of a tryout. Now watch this. They are going to give him the back flip. Here's where the belt prevents a fall."

The pupil put his hands upright, as for a handspring. Then he somersaulted backward to land on his feet again.

"Good!" applauded John's companion. "Hardly needed the mechanic. A back flip is not easy, by any means. My old master used to say, 'Fix your mind on keeping your arms stiff.' And that's prime advice because, if you bend them, you'll never get over, and likely knock your pate in the bargain. He's had the bender, that lad has. It always comes before the flip back is tried."

"What's a bender, sir?"

"Let me use the end of your mat, Jean," Fred Stelling called to one of the men. "I want to show my young friend the bender."

"Help yourself, Fred." They stepped to the stage. The clown put one of his hands on either side of John's waist, just above the hips.

"Now, let yourself go limp and lay back," he instructed, "only be sure to keep the soles of both feet on the floor. That's it! All the way down,

now. Let your arms droop. How about your hands? Are they touching the mat?"

But with the rush of blood to his head, John scrambled upright again.

"Not exactly perfect," the old clown smiled. "But, at any rate, you've got a better idea of the bender than if I had described it. Only, once your hands reach the mat, you've got to keep at it until you can hold the open palms flat against the floor with the heels of your hands as close up against the heels of your feet as you can get them. That puts suppleness into the back.

"Once having mastered the bender, so that you can do it without being held, you need only keep your arms perfectly stiff, give a jump, and the flip is easy. Even then, though, the mechanic should be used for safety."

"Gee! That's another new one!" said John, gratefully.

"New, did you say? Why, young gentleman, a man named Archange Tuccaro wrote a book on tumbling hundreds of years ago. There's a picture in it showing a boy doing a bender over a master's knee."

Together they walked along the hippodrome track to where a seal was performing on the farthermost stage.

"Only he isn't," the trainer said, as the clown stopped to greet him as Captain Huling. "Never

saw old Nep so stubborn. He blew his cue and ball trick at the matinée and doesn't want to do it now."

"You'll find this interesting to watch," Fred Stelling told John. "And now I'm off to do that neglected mending."

He put out his hand.

"Remember," he added, "I'll expect you to have perfected the slap and the bender by the next time we meet. There—there, no thanks at all. It was a pleasure to show you about."

It was not until the old clown had disappeared beyond the band stand that John turned back to watch the seal.

CHAPTER XXX

THE STRANGE WAYS OF SEALS

ON THE stage, Captain Huling was patting Nep's velvety neck. Then he backed away and gave a command. Barking and weaving his head from side to side, the seal flopped across the floor to the foot of a ladder. Here the trainer placed a small white ball on the tip of a billiard cue, and then stood the cue on the seemingly eager nose. The flippers caught the ladder rounds, and the body slowly mounted upward. He reached the top, and there, with a toss of his head, flung both the stick and the ball to the stage.

"No! No!" exclaimed Captain Huling. But Nep was already down the ladder and shuffling off to his pedestal.

"The trick," the trainer told John, "is for him to throw the cue but catch the ball on his nose. He missed it twice at the matinée, and, of course, when a trick is missed in performance, there's no time to insist on it. Yet you've got to get after any animal that flunks a trick just as quickly as possible. Otherwise, he'll ten to one lay down

on you at the next show. Now we'll try again—maybe you'll bring me luck."

He took a piece of fish from a basin and tossed it to the refractious Nep. Again he motioned him, and again the seal mounted the ladder, cue and ball on nose. Near the top he made as if to toss them.

"Not yet! Not yet!" warned the trainer. Another round passed, Nep paused. Then away rattled the cue on to the stage, and this time the white ball rested on his obedient nose.

"Good boy! Good boy!" applauded the Captain. "That's my daisy!"

It seemed as though Nep were as much elated over his success as was his master. He clapped his flippers and barked noisily. And this time he was rewarded with two bits of fish.

"Now, again," said Captain Huling. "You can do it—why, of course, you can—every time! That's a fine boy!"

He made Nep repeat the trick three times in succession.

"He'll be O. K. to-night," he predicted. "All right, boys, you can take him away."

As though he understood as well as the seal men, Nep slid himself into the waiting cart and was pushed off through the connection.

"No, they're not easy to train," the Captain said, as he and John followed the seal cart into the me-

nagerie. "I've heard old sea captains tell about seeing seals on rocks balancing hunks of driftwood on their noses. That may be so. All I know is that a green seal is about as biting and as fighting a lubber as you'd want to meet up with.

"First place those that we train aren't really seals but sea lions. A seal has very short flippers and so can't get about on a stage. Also, they have much shorter necks. However, since they all belong to the seal family, that point is of minor importance.

"All of ours come from the West coast—which is why you'll hear the menagerie boys call them the 'Pacific water dogs.' "

"What's the very first thing you do when you start to train them?" John wanted to know.

"Well, first of all, we must teach them to eat in captivity, and that's not easy, because, unlike many animals, they're mighty finicky. They must have absolutely fresh fish, and they want to take their catch alive. Of course, the latter's out of the question. So we put up a job on the new arrivals. We take a dead fish, tie a thread around its middle, and then run the thread through a hole in the roof above their tank. Mr. Newcomer would absolutely refuse a dead fish, but, when the string is jerked up and down and the fish shows movement, he's fooled into thinking it's alive, pounces on it, and eats it.

"As time goes on, we jiggle the fish less and less, and finally they are weened over to dining on entirely still ones. Now and then, we get a very stubborn seal, or it may be that he's just wiser than the rest. He'll start a hunger strike. But, fortunately, a seal can go quite a while without food, because nature makes it possible for him to live off his own store of blubber. Meantime, we take extra pains to coax him—even give him really live fish, now and then, with 'fool 'em' ones mixed in. So, in time, he joins in with our regular boarders.

"Once we get them to eating well, the next step is to make their closer acquaintance. So we turn the school into a sort of corral and wade in among them. But not in ordinary dress—I should say not! They'd nip our legs to pieces."

Captain Huling laughed.

"He should see us in our tin pants, eh, Mark?"

His brother nodded assent.

"Look something like a couple of knights of old," went on the Captain, "only with the top part of the armor left off. This saves our legs from the very sharp teeth. How they go after us at first! Barks, snaps, and lunges! But the teeth merely slip from the rounded protection, and so neither their mouths nor our legs are harmed. After a time, they give it up for a bad job. Meantime, we've named them. And now we begin to call each by his name. We talk soothingly. When

we dare, we reach down quickly, pat their heads, and then jerk back our hands. Gradually, we reach their necks with pats. As the days pass, they quiet down and no longer offer to bite.

"That much accomplished, they can be taken on to a stage similar to the one back there in the big top. Each has his particular pedestal and there he is taught to stay by coming to realize that it is only when he is there that he may expect to be tossed a piece of fish. Once they learn their places, the rest of the training is merely a matter of time and patience."

"My Uncle Jack says they never get anything to eat except when they are performing," said John.

"Your uncle is dead wrong, then. The seals in this tank and that over there get two buckets of fish every day of their lives. But they are a greedy animal, and I'm frank to say that it's their love of eating that is largely responsible for their performance. This is what is called the 'reward system' in training. But, holy smoke, isn't that true with men as well as animals? You don't suppose that I would troupe along with the circus for nothing, do you? I get my reward in dollars and they get theirs in fish. What's the difference?"

"I never thought of it like that before," John admitted.

"You're not unlike a lot of other folks I've met,"

the Captain smiled. "Speaking of fish, you should talk to Mr. Webb on that subject. He does the providing, and you better believe it's some job, at times. For they must have either fresh smelt or fresh herring. And when the show is playing in, say, Kansas or Nebraska, he has to do some tall figuring to order from some seaport market long enough in advance so that the stuff will be on by express in just the right time to meet us from day to day."

"Do you believe that animals think, Captain Huling?"

"A big question, my lad, and I'm not going to be foolish enough to answer it, yes or no. But I'm willing to remind you of something you just saw old Nep do, and then you can do a little deciding for yourself. What did he have on his nose when he went up that ladder?"

"The billiard cue with a ball on it," answered John.

"Right you are. Now, recall the trick: Once he gets to the top he throws the cue to one side and then catches the ball on his nose. If he merely had the stick and gave it the shove I'd say that wasn't especially remarkable. But, may it not be argued that, once at the top of the ladder, he has to go through some sort of a mental operation? Seems to me he might be figuring to himself—though, mind you, I'm not saying he does—'Now,

first, I've got to push this stick out of the way, and then, it gone, I've got to catch the ball on my nose.' Certainly, nobody will deny that there are two distinct things that happen. Ponder it yourself. Now, I'm going to write a letter home. Don't forget to put us right with your Uncle Jack."

And he ducked from view under the side wall.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BOSS WINDJAMMER TALKS

LEFT to himself, John wandered back into the big top. Those who had been at practice were now gone. A murkiness enveloped the vast interior like the gloom that invades a great cave at twilight.

Overhead, the sweep ropes lay close against the canvas like the rounded frets in a vaulted dome. Aloft, the aërial riggings formed only a confused mass.

In the foreground rose Old Bill, majestic in proportions, thrusting his huge girth upward through the gloom, coiled about at the waist with the falls rope tie-offs. Beyond, the other centers growing dimmer in recession.

"Old Bill!"

The boy went nearer, his feet padding crunchingly over the newly strewn shavings.

A fine name for a pirate. From one of the "sashes" of hemp the stanchion bolts stuck out as knives or pistol butts might protrude from a belt.

But the silent old pole that Jimmy Whalen had called "noble" begot no fearsome feeling.

John went up to it. Something impelled him to slap its rounded butt with the flat of his hand. The slap resounded in the deep stillness. For all was silence in the big top. It was as though he stood on the deck of some huge, ghost ship, with all sails set—much as the *Flying Dutchman* coursed the seas with no crew visible.

But that was merely fancy. For, of a sudden, something spit and flickered overhead. A spasm of light held long enough to flash against the blue and red quarter poles.

Then out, then on again.

The current had slipped along the buried cables that led from the dynamo wagons to the arcs that swung from the bail rings. The ghost ship was gone and in its place was the big top flooded with yellow light.

A dozen reserved-seat ticket sellers came in from the connection carrying black boxes under their arms. Ushers arrived through the back door buttoning their coats as they came.

Property men were placing chairs in the middle ring. Another distributed music racks before the chairs. That, John knew, was for the concert that was always given before the circus began.

He walked around the hippodrome track to

where the musicians were taking their instruments from their cases.

Merle Evans, the leader he had watched that afternoon, hailed him.

"Well, going to blow the whistle again tonight?" he asked.

"No, sir, I guess not."

The director whisked the dampness from his cornet and invited the boy to a seat beside him.

"Suppose you've got a band here in your home town, eh?"

"Two," said John. "Only they're not as good as yours. They don't even sound the same."

"Well!" laughed the other, "nice of you to say so. But I'll tell you something. A circus band is bound to sound different from pretty nearly any other kind. Know why? Canvas overhead. My tenor-drum player says it's because our music is strained—you know, sort of seeps into the muslin and that makes it mellow."

"What's a tenor drum?" John asked.

"Just another name for a snare. Never heard it called that before? Got to be tenor if the big one's a bass. Mostly though, we call it the little tub."

"That's a good name all right," the boy said.

"Never gave it much thought, but now you're asking questions, I suppose there are as many

funny names around the band here as anywhere else on the lot," Merle Evans said. "For instance, there are the several bars of music that sort of slide in between two tunes, connecting them up. A highbrow musician would speak of it as a 'transition.' But we just call it 'possum gravy'—you know, sort of soft and easy to take.

"Another thing that's mighty interesting is the way the bass drummer works. He's got to be all eyes. For every time a wire walker jumps and returns to a wire, or a clown throws a buster, or anything of that kind happens in the programme the drummer has to 'take the fall' as we call it, by landing his stick at just the right moment.

"Pretty nearly every instrument has a slang name of one kind or another," Merle Evans added, as he again blew through his horn. "Call the bass drum the big tub; and the man who plays it is a sheepskin fiddler."

John snickered. "What are some other names?"

"Well, the trombone is the slippery horn. Then we call a clarinet a gob stick, a French horn is the pretzel, the cymbals are the pot lids, and the tuba is the grunt horn. Hey, Freddie, what are some other names?" he appealed to a bandsman sitting near them.

"Well, there's the big drumstick. It's a potato masher or a walloper. And an alto is a peck horn. And the music is called the spots."

"Oh, yes, and I almost forgot the cornet here. It's called a frying pan, on account of the long barrel and flaring mouth," said Merle Evans.

"Forgot himself, too," put in Freddie. "We call him the teacher."

"But more often the boss windjammer," supplemented a bandsman from the top of the stand.

The laugh that followed this remark was interrupted by the voice of a man calling from the connection:

"Doors! Doorway!"

"That means the front doors are about to open to let the folks in," Merle Evans said. "So here's where we go to tooting. All right, boys!" They took themselves off to the middle ring, while, in a corner near the back door, John got out his note book and wrote down the odd names the leader had given him.

CHAPTER XXXII

AT THE FO'C'SLE DOOR

THE notes made, John stood for a time listening to the band and watching the people come in from the menagerie. Then he walked through the back yard and, picking his way along under the guy ropes, came to where the stake-and-chain wagons were waiting to be loaded for the night's run.

At the front end of that nearest him, he saw a small partitioned-off room. The door was swung outward. A gas stand lamp had been placed near it, and seated in the opening reading a newspaper was the ruddy-faced Jim Whalen.

"Well, if it isn't Jonathan himself!" exclaimed the boss, looking up as the boy stopped at the wagon wheel. "Guess you haven't seen my quarters yet, eh? The boys call it the fo'c'sle. Small but snug."

He jabbed a thumb over one shoulder toward the half-lighted interior. A sou'wester hung from a peg, and, from under it, a heavy raincoat draped its skirt over what looked like a seaman's chest.

"Here, roost yourself on the top of this bow wheel."

John climbed up and seated himself on the broad tire. At the rear of the wagon men were loading stakes and sledges. But, as yet, the boy saw nothing that looked like chains.

"Just a few extras," the boss said. "They'll be jammed to the gunnels once we take down the big top."

"But what kind of chains go in them, Mr. Whalen?"

"Nary a one of any sort, my lad, though I can remember when there were enough to start a dozen jails. That was back in the hey-rube days. Fights between showmen and towners as plentiful as flies at a picnic.

"You see, one of the smart tricks of the local toughs was to try to cut the guy ropes and let a tent sag. So, to protect the tops, the shows used to carry chain guys. They loaded 'em in with the stakes. Society's spruced up a lot since then, and so chains have got to be a thing of the past. But the old name of stake-and-chain still sticks to the wagons."

"I guess you've seen some fine fights, all right," John said.

The boss canvas man's moustache parted in a grin.

"Well, they weren't exactly what you'd call

ice-cream sociables. Especially along the river towns and through the mining country. Maybe about this hour, or more likely a bit later, you'd hear somebody yell, 'Hey-rube!' which was the showman's call for help. Then we'd each grab a stake or a laying-out pin and wade in. No such lights as we have now, mind you. No electricity at all. Sometimes we'd fight in pitch dark. If you were wise, you'd tie a white handkerchief around your arm or head to keep from being shinneyed by somebody on your own side. I've known times when we'd have to battle off and on till the last wagon was loaded and then volley our way clean down to the trains."

"But why did they want to fight you?"

"Just pure friskiness. Besides, I'm not so sure that the towners were always to blame. I'm suspicious that the showmen sometimes picked the quarrel. Still, I haven't got a very good memory as to that."

The boss closed one eye in a knowing wink.

"Yes, both the towners and the showmen have improved a good deal in disposition since those days of twenty and thirty years ago," he went on. "If you was to holler 'hey-rube' now, most of the hands wouldn't know what you meant."

From his perch on the wheel, John saw that men were bringing sledges to the wagons and that these were checked by an assistant boss.

"We count in every hammer," Jim Whalen told him. "That's so none will be left behind. Everything is taken along. That goes even for the bits of wood that are used to level up the jacks here and there under the seats. Keep your peepers primed to-night and you'll see the block boys going around with sacks, picking 'em up."

"Father says the circus system is the greatest in the world," John said.

"Well, it's a powerful good one. Got to be or we couldn't move."

"But what makes the system, Mr. Whalen?"

"Now, that's a poser. Blamed if I ever give it a thought," the other admitted. "Of course, for one thing, there's got to be plenty of help and there's got to be bosses and assistants that know just what every man ought to do and when—do it fast but without getting excited. Mostly, though, I'd say you've got to have generalship." He gave a reminiscent chuckle.

"I used to know an old-timer who was always saying, 'Don't never argue with no towner—outgeneral him.' And that goes for weather and every other sort of trouble that comes along. Certain it is that there's no use standing around palavering with rain or a muddy lot. You've got to outgeneral 'em.

"And, boy," he continued very soberly, "you've got to be plumb sold on miracles—always believ-

ing that things that can't be done, can. You'd be surprised how many times we show when a hundred and two per cent. of the towners think we won't.

"I recollect a day in Lawton, Oklahoma, when we battled from sun-up to well-nigh dark. That was on account of the wind. Bless me, if she wasn't a darling! The lot was overcoated with a sandy loam. Not a long-string driver that could see his leaders for dust.

"The cook tent, being in early, got up. But nary another yard of canvas. On the big top we made it as far as the first raise on the peaks, but soon as we'd get a dozen side poles under an end, the zephyrs would cut in and set the muslin to flapping like a sheet on a clothes line.

"Twenty, yes, forty times, we placed 'em. Then a flap that would yank the men from the ground and send the side props spinning like so many toothpicks. You see, if we could once get the side poles set, the roof stiffened with the quarters, and the side wall around so's the wind couldn't belly her up from underneath, she'd be a pretty thing, no matter how strong the wind. But we couldn't get a tenth that far.

"At noon, we repaired to Ollie Webb's hostelry for refreshments. He had his side walls lashed fore and aft, but nothing but a plate-glass cook house could have kept out the dust that day. So

everybody, working men in one line and limberjims in another, took slices of bread, clapped a piece of meat between the covers, and ate like an Irishman lighting a pipe in a gale. There was coffee, if you didn't mind a little sand with your sugar, and after that we went back to the field of battle.

"It was the same tale repeated. Over and over again. The sun, looking a sickly yellow through the dust clouds, was dropping lower at every try. This very same watch I've got here now showed four o'clock. We'd lost the matinée. Still, there was the night show.

"Then, of a sudden, there came a lull in the wind. It wasn't over long, but every man-jack took advantage of it. They flew at those side poles like rats at a cheese. The circle was made and guys tightened over the staubs. We got another raise on the peaks. Up went the quarters, horns shootin' into the grummets. Another lift of the peaks. We bandaged her around with the side wall—she was safe as a lily in a hothouse.

"Yes, it blew again a little later. But now we had her—bows on to the enemy."

"And was there a show that night?" John asked eagerly.

"Doors opened on as balmy an evening as this we're sitting in this very minute. Which goes to prove that you never can tell what a night's going

to look like from what the sun has to show you."

From his seat in the "fo'c'sle" doorway, the boss looked up at a sky sprinkled with stars. Then toward the big top. From within, the light seeped through the eaves openings to break into amber splashes against the wagons. High above, the shadowy roof slanted upward to the ridge rope, and at regular intervals you could see other blobs of yellow in those places where "Old Bill" and his fellows thrust their heads out into the night.

"A stubborn old girl, at times," Jim Whalen said as he cocked an eye toward the great gray bulk. "As frisky as a whale on a harpoon. But with all her faults, I love her still."

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHEN THE MENAGERIE MOVED

THE big top around which Jim Whalen continued to spin his stories was now filled from eaves to quarter poles with those who had come for the night performance.

"About time they started frolicking," the boss had said; and a few minutes later added, "There she goes now."

John's ear caught the note of Fred Bradna's whistle. Immediately on the heels of it came the "boom-boom" of the pageant drums and the blare of the trumpets. For a moment, these were drowned by the tumult of shouts that went up from the crowd, then swept aloft to the very lacings in the strident march that the boy knew was leading the tournament in from the back yard.

But he did not return to it.

"Of course, there are a lot of things that differ between putting up and taking down," Jim Whalen told him as they walked toward the menagerie tent, "but the mainest one is that we go straight ahead in the morning until the job's done, while at night we have to wait on the folks."

"The menagerie comes down next, doesn't it?" John asked.

"The minute the teams have taken the cages away and the bulls come out from their act," the boss nodded. "See the ponies waiting over there?"

Along one side of the animal tent, the boy made out a confused mass of harnessed grays and roans, each team with its driver astride a wheel horse.

"They'll start to trot in a minute or two," Jim Whalen said.

Now reaching the menagerie stake line, he peered about from side to side. Then he dug a stubby ivory whistle from one pocket.

"Already with you, men?"

"We's all here, Mr. Jimmy," a negro canvas man called back.

Then, from inside the menagerie, someone shouted, "Take it away!"

The boss canvas man gave a blast with his whistle.

As though he had held a string now suddenly severed, the entire side wall slipped to the ground. With a thump of hoofs and a jangle of traces, the waiting teams charged under the roof. Helpers hooked them to the cages. Drivers mounted to the seats of the now tightly tarpaulined dens. In even less time than it had taken John to skip across to the foot of a center pole to which Jim Whalen had directed him with instructions to

"stay there until I send for you," the whole interior had become a maze of moving dens.

Yet there was no more confusion than there had been when the tournament poured back into the yard. Hardly a voice, unless you counted the "Gee-daps" of the drivers. With these there mingled the rumble of hoofs and resonant clucks that came from the fan-like wheels of the cages. Gradually, these cages rounded into an orderly procession that rumbled out of the tent and off through the night.

Not that John's eyes followed each one as it went. He was kept far too busy trying to look a half dozen ways at one time. For no sooner had the teams come in than Jim Whalen's men had begun to "trip" the red and blue quarter poles. Then, as the spaces cleared underneath, they pulled the horns from the grummets, lowered the poles to their shoulders, and carried them off to the waiting wagons.

At the center poles, chandeliers and arcs were being lowered and packed away. Only stand lights remained. By these John saw the deep-floored and arched-roofed homes of Annie and Louisa passing out under the eaves—the sections of their corrals lashed fast to their sides. And walking behind the last, his coat slung over one shoulder and his black pipe glowing, Old Andrew, their keeper!

The cages in the clear, the camels and zebras followed next—"the humps and the convicts," as Art Rooney had called them.

Under the whole somber roof there now remained only the seal dens, which would remain on the lot until "Nep" and his fellows had finished their act; these and a half dozen elephants who awaited the return of their comrades from the rings.

Far down the tent, the boy made out the dim bulk of Old John. Except for an occasional swaying of his trunk, he might have been a bronze statue. Dolly stood near him, weaving back and forth at the end of her chain. There followed a wide gap filled at its end by two other elephants. Then emptiness again, until the boy's roving eye found the gray outlines of Fanny and Romey at the other end of the line.

Between him and them, emptiness; between him and the eaves' edge of the now sagging roof, emptiness. To the left and the right, center poles, their butts showing dull blue in the eerie light of the stand lamps. Once again he felt that strange feeling of being alone on the deck of a forsaken ship.

He was of half a mind to desert the post at which Jim Whalen had stationed him. Yet he remained. Of course, there could be no danger. Besides,

there were hundreds of people within less than a stone's throw.

"Lot fleas," as the boss canvasman had termed those who hung around without going into the show, gaping in under the canvas shell; men working stake pullers along its edge; Jim Whalen, himself, his arms akimbo, ordering his crew "to the side poles."

Past them, in the direction John was facing, lay the big top resounding with "hoop-las" and melody. There came a change in the music—"possum gravy," perhaps. Then it stopped altogether. The shrill of the whistle, a long-drawn "Ta-ta-a-aaah" from the band, and a roar of applause from the crowd.

Almost at the same instant, a section of the big-top side wall was hoisted eavesward. Through the opening a broad shaft of yellow light sprang out as though to form a pathway to the menagerie tent. John caught a momentary glimpse of the audience, and then the opening was blotted by the silhouette of on-coming elephants.

"Heads up! Out of the way for the bulls!" warned a voice.

They streamed along the ribbon of light and in under the roof, their trainers running by their side and urging them forward. As they passed John, every fifth trunk dropped every fifth tail until herd

by herd, like squads of soldiers, they had filled the gaps in the line-up.

Once they were in their places, there came the business of chaining them together for the march to the runs—Dolly to Old John; Emma and Marcella to Queen; Alice and Bingo to Pom, and so down the line.

At the cry of "Duke!" each of the lead elephants knelt part way to the ground, allowing the riders to mount to their heads. Old John had knelt, too. A man carrying a white lantern swung up between his flopping ears to point the big fellow's yard-wide head down the tent. Two by two, or three by three, the entire column wheeled in behind John.

"Going away!" called John's rider.

"Going away!" echoed the next.

And as the cry was taken up along the entire length of the line, Old John, a last morsel of hay still in his trunk, moved out from under the roof.

"Now that old freight train is off the siding, we can let her down," said someone at the boy's elbow.

It was his friend Sis Hopkins.

"Always have to wait until the caboose elephant gets into the clear though. Here she comes. That's Hattie. See the red tail light?"

Sure enough, as the undulating column swayed past, John saw that the man who rode the "lead" elephant of the final pair carried a red lantern under one arm.

It was now the only light that showed under the roof, for, with the first movement of Old John, men had carried the last stand lamp into the open.

"Haven't time to tell you what's going to happen next," Sis Hopkins added hurriedly. "But you just stick close to me. The boss wants to give you a touch of high life."

While Sis was speaking, John heard the voice of Jim Whalen calling to his men.

"Are you at them?"

An answering chorus of "Ayes" that seemed to come from every side.

"See 'em all around?" waved Sis Hopkins. "A man at every side pole waiting to jerk 'em out. Also one at each of the centers, same as we are at this one."

"But when do we go out?" John asked.

"You wait and see. Only be ready to take it on the lam when I give the word." He set about clearing the main falls.

Again the voice of Jim Whalen coming from beyond the eaves.

"All right, Whitey?"

"All right," responded a half-muffled voice down the tent.

"Frisco?"

"Righto!"

"O. K., Sis? Jonathan with you?"

"O. K. for both of us," called back the assistant.

"Jim's calling the center pole roll to see that every man is in place," he added to John.

The boy heard the last three hailed and caught their replies.

Then the bellowing voice of the boss canvas man:

"Let 'em go!"

As if pulled outward by a single hand, the entire oval of side poles, each manned by a pair of brawny arms, was uprooted and flung to the ground. At the same instant, Sis Hopkins and the men at the other center poles released the main falls.

For a moment, the rays from the search lamps set here and there about the lot remained long enough under the top to show John that the entire roof was slowly sinking upon their very heads!

The eaves fluttered like the wings of giant birds.

A swish of wind set in motion by the descending canvas caught him full in the face.

"Shut your eyes against the dust," Sis Hopkins called. "Here, give me your hand."

Already the boy's ears were set tingling by the creak of the fall ropes singing in the cheaves and the rasping of the bail rings against the poles. Sis was giving a last yank at the rope that had started to foul. John's grip tightened on his free hand.

"Nothing can hit you!" the other shouted in his

ear. "Just like a balloon. It's got to ride down on the air that's inside. There. She's clear! Now, then—on the lam!"

Pulling the boy with him, he made a dash for the all but grounded eaves edge, and three seconds later, they were in the open air.

"Now to tramp the wind out of her. Come on, back we go again!"

But not under the roof. Instead, Sis climbed the edge of the billowing canvas. For the air that had been captured by the falling top was now caught and held in mountainous pockets. Into the valleys that lay between these great wallowing hummocks they went, the man leading and John stumbling after.

"Won't be no lie when you tell the folks you walked on air," Sis called over one shoulder. "There—tramp in that young mountain just ahead of you!"

But the boy's feet had gone but a few steps when he fell forward, sprawling at full length on the huge, air-filled cushion. And when he scrambled upright it was to see Jim Whalen wading toward him across the canvas.

"Well, Jonathan," he sang out, "how'd you like that for an act?"

"Gee, it was great, Mr. Whalen!"

"Had him going for a second before we got out though," chuckled Sis Hopkins.

"It sure did," John admitted.

"Well, now, you'd better run along to the back door," the boss canvas man said. "Somebody or other was saying Fred Bradna wanted you."

He swung off to oversee the work of unlacing, while John hurried away to find the equestrian director.

CHAPTER XXXIV

POSSUM GRAVY FOR ONE

FRED BRADNA was halfway down the hippodrome track when John came into the big top. But at a motion from Merle Evans, the boy slipped into a chair in front of the band.

If the truth be told, he was glad to sit down. His "pins," as Butterfly Stelling would have put it, were growing weary. Yet he had no intention of giving up. A real trouper, Jim Whalen had told him, was one who could stick from "black night to black night and never bat a winker."

Still, the rest of that evening proved to be welcome "possum gravy" for John Foster: a transition, "sort of soft and easy to take," bridging between a day filled with adventure and the hour when the big top would be struck and the last wagon pull off the lot.

Besides, wasn't it something to have a chair square alongside of Lew Graham, the big-voiced announcer? And hear Jim Spriggs call "Howdy, John!" out of one corner of his mouth as he clowned past on the hippodrome track?

Or receive a smile from Miss Leitzel and a wave from May Wirth?

Whillikers, yes!

Or fun no end just sitting there, now and then turning an eye to watch "Freddie" at the big tub catching this fall and that with his walloping potato masher.

Hunched there discovering how the wire walkers kept an eye on the "end of the thread"; or breathlessly waiting while "Nep" made his ascent of the ladder with the cue and the ball perched high on his nose. Did it, of course—as slick as a whistle! Just as Captain Huling had predicted he would.

. . . Searching out Paul Nelson in the maze of the menage act; seeing Frank Dial come in with the horses that found their places by number.

. . . Now Micky Graves and his men were raising the nets for the big aërial displays.

. . . The crazy number! All the clowns were in that: Fred Stelling in a quite different make-up; Jules Turnour as a gendarme with a funny goatee; Mike Morris grinning at him through the white of the "muck"! Spader Johnson! Charlie Cheer!

"There goes Ernie Clarke," pointed out Lew Graham, who had promised to tell him when the famous flyer came in. "The slimmest one, dressed in white."

John watched the aërialist mount to the pedestal. . . . Possum gravy, that worked out of the jazz to which the clowns had paraded to glide into the gentler strains of a softly played waltz.

All set up above!

A hurtling through the air as Ernie Clarke flew outward on the trapeze, then left it to dart onward to his brother's waiting hands. Was he, as Fred Stelling had said, wondering whether or not he had left the bar straight? Anyhow, he had. You could see that, plain enough. See, too, that there was no one on the pedestal to right it for the return. There! It was swinging inward again!

Tossed back by the catcher, the slim-bodied one seemed for an instant to be poised in midair. Then his hands clasped the bar and he was borne back to the pedestal.

Something to know about!

Something, too, to wait for Silver. Other jumpers first. Cracking fine ones, all right. Then the star leaper of all. Not worth his salt for years, and now——!

A silky coated beauty of creamish yellow with a white mane and tail. How impatient he was to go! Other horses and the barrier had to be set first, though.

"There!" said Lew Graham.

A quick, short gallop, a sudden rise in the air as though wings were carrying him, and Silver had

cleared the whole of them as pretty as a thistle breezed over a wall!

"Gee!" exclaimed John.

"'Gee' is right!" echoed Fred Bradna, who had come up at that moment. "Isn't he a picture?"

The equestrian director had talked with John several times during the course of the evening, but if he had wanted the boy for any special reason, he said nothing of it.

Then, not long after, when the performance was over, he came up again to bid him good-bye.

"And here," he said, taking a small square package from his pocket. "This is for you. Only you must not open it until we are gone. Now, I say good-night. We will see you next year, maybe? Sure we will! Good luck."

As the crowd moved out of the big top, John's father came to the band stand from across the rings. It was the first time they had seen each other since the evening before.

"Very well," he ended after they had talked for a moment, "You see it all the way through, son. I just came over to say I'll meet you after the big top is down. Won't mind watching it myself. I'm going to take mother home, now."

"We'll have him for you if we have to put him under arrest," declared a voice at their back.

It was John Brice, the show's detective.

"All right, Chief," laughed Mr. Foster. "But

now I'd best be getting back to Mrs. Foster. She's promised that John and I can stay out as late as we want to-night, and she may change her mind if I keep her waiting too long."

He edged his way off through the outgoing crowd.

CHAPTER XXXV

WITH THE CIRCUS DETECTIVE

AT THE time John had met Chief Brice in the cook tent and later learned that he was the circus detective, he had been disappointed. He had supposed that a detective should at least have a moustache. Yet here was one as clean shaven as his own father, and except that he was of powerful build, a good deal like any other man.

Still, moustache or no moustache, you couldn't help liking him. He had such a fine laugh. Only it was not the kind that made much noise, but rather seemed to start at the Chief's eyes, spread down to his mouth, there to be swallowed in a series of almost inaudible chuckles.

Another thing that struck John was that he seemed to know everybody connected with the circus, and that everybody with the show knew him. Even all the working men. As they walked over the lot it was, "Evening, Chief," on every side. And in reply, "How are you, Pink?"—"Hello, Windy."—"How're tricks, Darwin?"—"Feeling better to-night, Boston?"

Not a black man among the scores upon scores of canvas men but seemed to be acquainted with the Chief.

"Only there's a new hand who joined out yesterday that I want to know a little more about," he said to John as they cut in between a line of wagons.

They came upon a knot of canvas men.

"Henry Smith here?" the Chief demanded.

"Yas, sah!" answered a voice from the group.

"Come on out here, boy, I want to talk to you."

A lank, gangling Negro lunged after them to the light of a stand lamp.

The Chief eyed him for fully a minute in silence.

"Where'd you work last?"

"I's with de Sparks show."

"Where'd you leave it?"

"In Smithville, las' week."

"Who'd you work under over there?"

"Dey called him George—I done jes disremember his las' name."

"George Singleton?"

"I kain't be sure, Mister Brice. Anyhow, though, I know it was George sumthin'."

"All right. See that you behave yourself around here."

"I ain't goin' to do nuthin' else, Mister Brice."

"I guess he's sound," the Chief said to John as they moved away. "Tells a straight enough story.

The Sparks circus was in Smithville last week, and their boss canvas man is George Singleton. A fine clean show, too, and a workingman coming from it is likely to be O. K. Besides, if he was of a mind to lie, he'd have agreed that the boss's last name was Singleton."

"But why did you ask him questions?" John wanted to know.

"Got the earmarks of a smart-boy, meaning a pickpocket. Dips don't light around here very often, but when they do, we give them a mighty swift runaway."

"My uncle says there always are pickpockets following a circus."

"Your uncle is putting it strong, then," returned Chief Brice. "Wherever a big crowd gets together, whether it's to see a circus, a May festival, or a funeral, there's a chance of a mob of guns showing up—that being another name for the slick-fingered lads. But they know their health is likely to turn bad if they try trailing us.

"Every morning our men work the railway station around the hour when the excursions are coming in. Then we cover the main streets, and later mingle in the crowd around the lot, the front, and in and out of the sideshow. After you've tromped over most of the Union a score of times, you not only get acquainted with the faces of all

the bad boys, but get so you can spot one as quick as your father would guess the weight of a bale of hay.

"So, when they now and then come around, we nail them, turn them over to the police, or see that they leave town on the next outgoing train. But not without a warning, the same being that if we ever catch sight of them again we'll knock their crooked blocks off. There never was a dip with any honest to goodness nerve. They're all cowards, and a threat of a beating will keep one farther away from you than all the jails in fourteen states."

"Do you ever put on a disguise?" the boy asked.

"Sure," answered the Chief. He set his hat, Napoleon-like, crosswise of his head. "Know me now?"

To John's grin, he added his own silent laugh.

"Haven't got a single set of false whiskers," the Chief declared. "And let me tell you something," he confessed, putting a big arm around John's shoulders as they talked. "Let me tell you that most of the whiskers used by detectives are found in only two places—in books and the bunk come-ons sent out by fake concerns purporting to teach boys how to become secret-service men.

"Now, nobody's got any objection to a good yarn, no matter how full of phony spinach it may

be, but it's a dogged shame how many lads are taken in by impostors. We get quite a few of such every summer—boys coming up with stars under their coats, somebody having told them the tin would get them into the show free of charge, they being detectives. Too bad to disappoint them, but it's a good lesson. Now and then, they are given secret passwords.

"I remember one afternoon in a small town in Nebraska when a fellow edged up to the main entrance, sort of sly-like, and whispered something into the ear of a ticket taker.

" 'What's that?' asked the doorman.

"The stranger whispered again.

" 'Camel's milk!' exclaimed the ticket taker. 'Well, what about it?'

" 'Hist!' says the other looking about. 'Not so loud! You know what I mean—Camel's milk.'

"I beckoned him inside the marquee and questioned him. Well, sir, it turned out that he had been instructed by some so-called detective college that 'camel's milk' was a pass word generally used by showmen, and that, by giving it, he'd be let in any time! Dogged if he didn't dig down and show me the paragraph printed in a little book. Must have been at least sixteen years old. You'd have thought he'd known better."

They had come to a jack wagon and stood leaning against it. The work of tearing down the big

top was now well under way. As with the menagerie, the side wall had been dropped, and men who swarmed in and out like bluebottle flies were carrying seat planks and stringers. Nearer at hand, a gang was loosening the hitches from the stakes. Quarter poles, too heavy to be carried, were laid on what Chief Brice called the "smoke cart" which conveyed them to the long-reach wagons.

"Do you always stay to watch it come down?" John asked.

"No, indeedy. Mostly, I'm on my way before this. But I'm doing double shift to-night. Frank Cook, our legal adjuster, had business over in the next stand, and so I'm looking after his work. Work!" The Chief clapped the boy on the back. "Guess you don't glimpse much of that, lounging here against this old wagon, eh?"

Though he did not say so, John had been thinking that very thing.

"The show business is a funny one in a lot of departments," the detective said. "Some days you haven't a great deal to do, and other days aren't half long enough.

"Take the legal adjuster: busier than a couple of bird dogs at times. Somebody will show up exhibiting a tear in his pants and maintaining he caught them on a stake. He wants us to pay for a new suit of clothes. Another comes along as-

serting one of our wagons rubbed the paint off his car. He wants damages. A third declares one of our bulls ate his best straw hat."

"No!" John exclaimed.

"As true as we're standing here," nodded Chief Brice. "Sometimes the claims are just, and when they are, we make things right. Sometimes they aren't, and then the adjuster gives the claimant an argument. If he's unwilling to listen to reason, we let him start suit, and then our legal department fights the case. Queer, though, the number of otherwise pretty honest folks who seem to think there's nothing wrong in trying to beat a circus or a railroad. Take the case of the cherry tree."

"What was that?" John asked.

"As funny a come-off as I ever saw," laughed the Chief. "We were showing on a lot that was hedged in on one side by a chap's back yard. Just inside his fence was a cherry tree.

"He came to us, all worked up and swearing that one of our wagons had brushed the overhanging limbs and ruined the tree. Frank Cook went to have a look. Sure enough, a couple of small shoots had been broken, and, like as not, by a wagon. But Frank pointed out that a little trimming would make the thing as good as new and offered the man a dollar or so to hire somebody to cut it back.

"The owner snorted at the suggestion. Tree damaged beyond all repair. Had a sentimental value, too—a great favorite of his wife's. He'd have to dig it up and plant a new one. He wanted $30—I think that was the amount. Cook argued, but he wouldn't budge a cent. Finally Frank gave up.

" 'All right,' he said. 'Here's your money. Just scribble me a receipt.'

"Then, while the fellow was writing it, Frank called for some men and a stake puller.

" 'Just go over in that yard, boys, throw the chain around that tree, and drag it out.'

"The owner's face was a study.

" 'What's that!' he stuttered. 'You mean you are going to take my tree?'

" 'Your tree, nothing,' Frank rejoined. 'The show's just bought it from you, hasn't it? No good to you, anyhow, as you say you'll have to dig it up. Go ahead, boys.'

"Of course, it stayed," Chief Brice concluded. "The fellow's game was to get a nice piece of money and have the tree too. In the end, he was glad to take the amount first offered him."

The big top roof had come down while Chief Brice was telling the story, and across the canvas that now lay on the ground, John could see the stocky Jim Whalen. He recalled what the boss had said about the wind and rain.

"I guess Mr. Cook just outgeneraled him," he said.

"That's exactly what he did," the detective nodded. "Just as it happened when the sheriff wanted to pinch one of our elephants."

"Pinch an elephant!"

The Chief picked up a stick and began to whittle it into long, yellow shavings.

"The contrariest minion of the law I ever did see," he mused. "I forget what the squawk was about, but, anyway, papers had been served, and instead of being satisfied with a bond, which was the business-like proceeding in this particular case, this here John Law insisted that he'd have to attach something belonging to the show. Finally he decided on an elephant.

" 'Well, if your mind's made up, I guess there's no way out of it,' Frank Cook sighed. 'There they are, Sheriff; take your choice.'

"It was along about seven at night and walking up and down the line-up the minion picked on Albert, the biggest bull in the herd. Whereupon orders were given to leave him behind when the rest of the elephants were sent off to the cars. They staked the old boy out and gave him some hay. Meantime, however, Frank had seen to it that the man who usually rode Albert to the runs was left on the lot. He had an idea, and pretty soon he started putting it to work.

"'I'll say one thing for you, Sheriff: You've got the biggest bull we own,' he commented a bit ruefully.

"'Don't suppose I'd be takin' no skinny one, do you?' cackled the officer, mighty pleased with the compliment.

"'Bad elephant though,' Frank continued, not paying any attention to the interruption.

"'How do you mean bad?'

"'Oh, just a man-killer. Faked a keeper last week and broke his back. But you won't have much trouble, Sheriff. Not if you keep him well chained.'

"'Now, see here!' the other began.

"'Big eater, too,' Frank went on. 'Five bales a day. By the way, Sheriff, you'll have to furnish the feed for him, won't you? Leastwise, while he's in your charge?'

"'Say, look here, Cook! Do you mean to tell me that——'

"'I mean to tell you that you're doing us a real favor taking that elephant that stands yonder. He's the meanest critter on four legs. Going to get rid of him soon as we could. You've just saved us the trouble.'

"Frank started away," the Chief continued, "but you should have seen that old John Law following him up. Pretty soon, he was begging like a good fellow to give the elephant back and take a

bond instead. Well, after he'd let him sweat awhile, Frank finally agreed. Then Albert's keeper came out of hiding and took him down to join the rest of the herd."

"But you've still got him!" John protested.

"I should say we have. One of the finest elephants in America. Always was. That's the reason Frank wasn't going to leave him behind if there was any way out of it. Get the racket, don't you?

"Later on, I asked Frank how he'd happened to think up the yarn. 'Came to me all of a sudden,' he said. 'As soon as I was satisfied that the sheriff really meant to attach one of the bulls, I got to thinking. Then I recalled having somewhere or other read about a king who used to get even with an enemy by presenting him with a white elephant. The white one being sacred it was against the rules for anybody but the king to sell or give it away. So it just hung around and ate the enemy out of house and home. All I did was to twist the thing to fit old John Law, adding the man-killer stuff for good measure.'

"A fast thinker, Frank Cook," finished Chief Brice. "Got to be, in his game."

"Is John Law the circus name for a sheriff?" the boy asked, remembering his notes.

"Well, you might say it is for one who likes to

keep parading his star and authority. But that brand is fairly rare. Most of the officers we meet are mighty fine fellows."

"I'm writing down a list of all the slang names," John volunteered.

"Not a bad idea. Let's see what you've picked up."

Getting out his notebook the boy read off the names that Merle Evans had given him for the different band instruments, along with the many odd phrases that he had jotted down during the day. As he was reading Fred Warrell joined them and stood listening.

"How about 'fleeting the pole'?" he put in, when John had finished. "That's what the canvas men call handling the pusher they use when ramming the baled canvas into the wagons. See them at it over there?"

The boy looked to see men working with a spar as big as a small quarter pole. But in place of a horn, its top was fitted with a rounded piece of wood like the head of a mallet. "Fleeting the pole" went down in the book.

"What's some others, Chief?" Fred Warrell asked.

Between them, they reeled off the names, and when they had finished John had added the following to his list:

A small machine or tool—a gimix.
A necktie—a banner.
A vest—a middle-piece.
An overcoat—a Bennie.
A suitcase or bag—a keester.
Monkeys—the old folks.
Ostriches—the big turkeys.
A boa constrictor—the big worm.
Trains—the rattlers.
A dime—a demo.
A dollar bill—a buck.
A $10 bill—a sawbuck.
A $20 bill—a double saw.
A $1,000 bill—a grand.
A boss—the gaffer.
An umbrella—a mush, round top, or shower stick.
A sold-out performance—a turn-away.
High-standing collar—starched furs.
Balloons—the cherries.

By the time the final one had been scribbled down, the last bale of canvas had been "fleeted" into the wagons and the heavy vans thumped their way off the lot. Only the center poles remained aloft.

"And they'll be coming down in a jiffy," Fred Warrell said.

"Well, looks like all's going to be peaceful on the Potomac to-night," yawned the Chief. "Guess I'll go down to the cars and turn in. So long, John. But if you get in any trouble, just send for the old officer. Dogged if I won't put on my disguise and pry you out."

He set his hat Napoleon-wise and drew in his chest and chin in a deep, soundless laugh. Then, giving the boy a farewell slap on the back, strode away.

CHAPTER XXXVI

JOHN GETS HIS TIME

"JUST about the last thing to go off the lot," Fred Warrell said, as he and the boy walked in the direction of the big top pole wagon.

Canvas men carrying the first center were moving toward it. A score of shoulders bore the tremendous weight, and twice that number of legs, flitting along underneath—now in shadow, now steeped in the dusky light of stand lamps—wrought a weird effect. It was as though a centipede of gigantic size had somehow come upon the earth and was groping its way across the pasture.

Steadily, surely, that which had been only a grassy field, then a place of wonderful adventure, was now about to return to its first state of emptiness. The boy experienced a strange feeling of loneliness.

A second and a third centipede passed, each to have its long body stretched on the pole wagon, while the legs, separated from it, went loping back through the gloom.

White teeth gleamed in faces that looked the blacker because of the night. Men sang at their

work. One, who seemed a sort of chanty leader, started the song of the stands:

"I'se been down East, I'se been out West,
I'se been as far as Fargo;
But debil such town I never did see
As de town dey call Chi-car-go!"

Another centipede moved past.

But now John's eyes were on Old Bill. Like a giant sentinel, he had stood, his head thrust toward the stars—bearing the strain that came with the lowering of the last pole but himself.

Then the loosening of the final long guy, a slight wavering, and even he sank slowly groundward.

Only a big tent pole painted blue. But somehow different from the rest. A fellow hated to see it anywhere but up. But, of course, the show had to move on.

"Thunderin' Roman chariots, Jonathan, haven't you got any home at all?" boomed the boss canvas man's voice at his back. "Know who that is?" he inquired, swinging one hand toward the pole that was now being carried away.

"Yes, sir. Old Bill."

"William, himself," nodded Jim Whalen. "Don't get on the lot as early as some things with the show, but by the great horn spoon he outstays 'em at night!"

Not much left to do now.

Guys to be rolled up, the bull stakes to be drawn from the ground; blocks and falls carted away; Old Bill's gum shoe, as the boss called the mud block, to be removed, and the heavy bail ring heaved aboard the rigging van. That done, the last of the wagons rumbled down the slope followed by the canvas men—the chanty leader still singing his song.

"As bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard, I reckon," Jim Whalen remarked, taking a squint four ways across the pasture.

Nothing remained. Nothing save a few "towners," John's father among them, standing at a little distance. These and the two men and John Foster.

A buggy drawn by a single horse drove up.

"Well, Skipper, what do you say?" asked Fred Warrell, as he climbed into the seat. Jim Whalen followed, took the reins from the dashboard, and tucked them under one arm.

"Just wait until I touch off this Peruvian cigar," he said.

The flame of the match waved in and out, lighting his ruddy face and red moustache. Between puffs, he leaned over to shake the boy by the hand.

"Well, Jonathan, I guess we can give you your time now," he said. "But come around next year and blow me for a middle piece if I don't double your pay. Giddap, Tanglefoot!"

They were gone.

John and his father drove homeward in silence. That same feeling of loneliness had again come over him. He lay back in his seat thinking of all the thousand things he had seen during the day. He felt for his notebook to make sure it was there. As he did, his fingers closed on the package that Fred Bradna had given him.

"Jiggeldy Moses!" he exclaimed.

He leaned forward to the dashlight and undid the string. Inside a small box he saw something shiny. It was the whistle!

THE END